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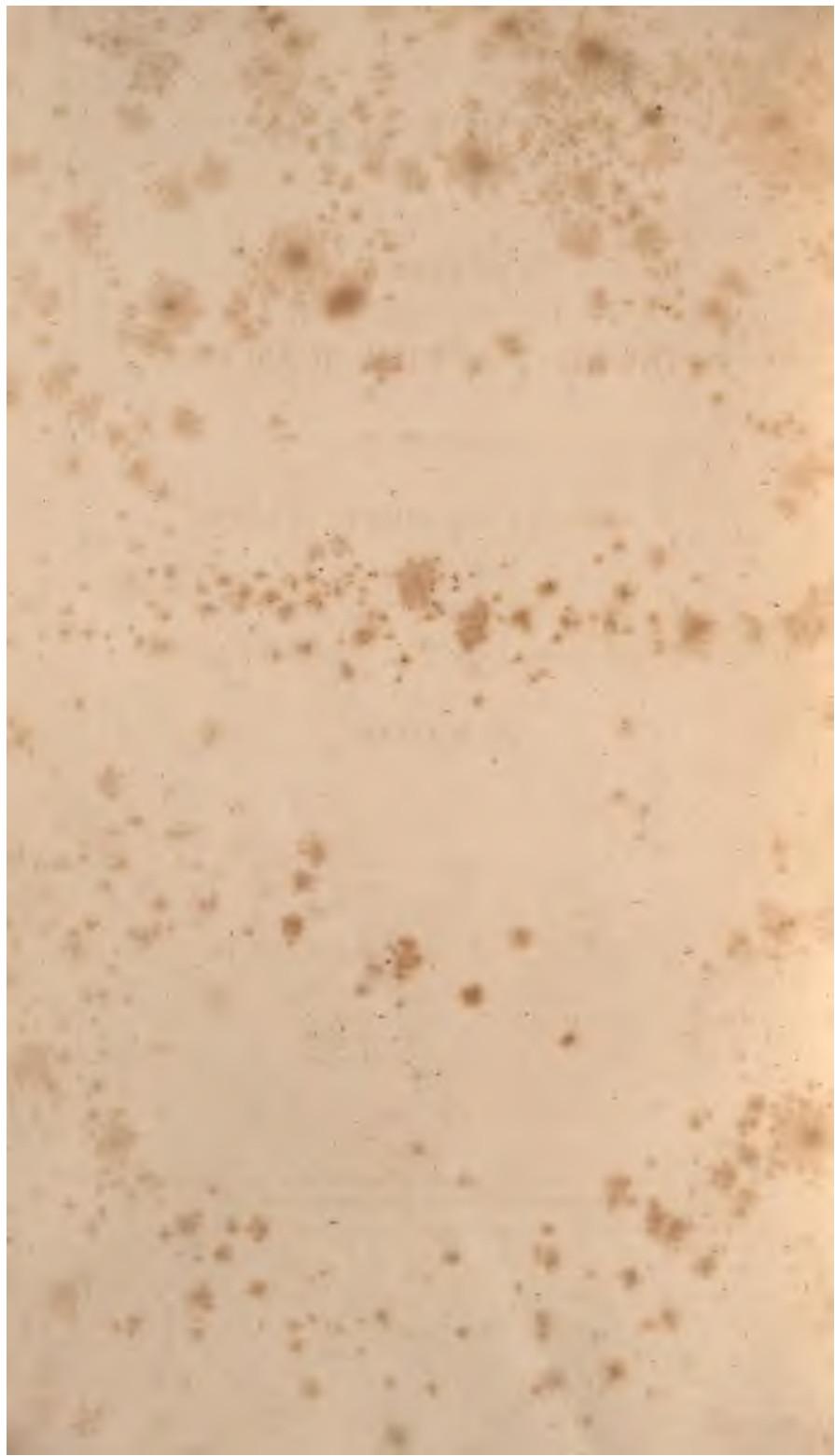
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LECTURES

ON

ST. PAUL'S

EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS,

PREACHED ON THE

WEDNESDAYS AND FRIDAYS IN LENT,

IN

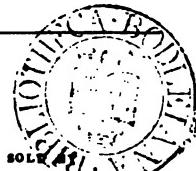
THE PARISH CHURCH, AND IN ST. MARGARET'S CHAPEL,

IN WALCOT.

BY THE

REV. C. A. MOYSEY, D.D.

Archdeacon of Bath, and Rector of Walcot.



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TO THE PARISHIONERS OF WALCOT,

THESE LECTURES

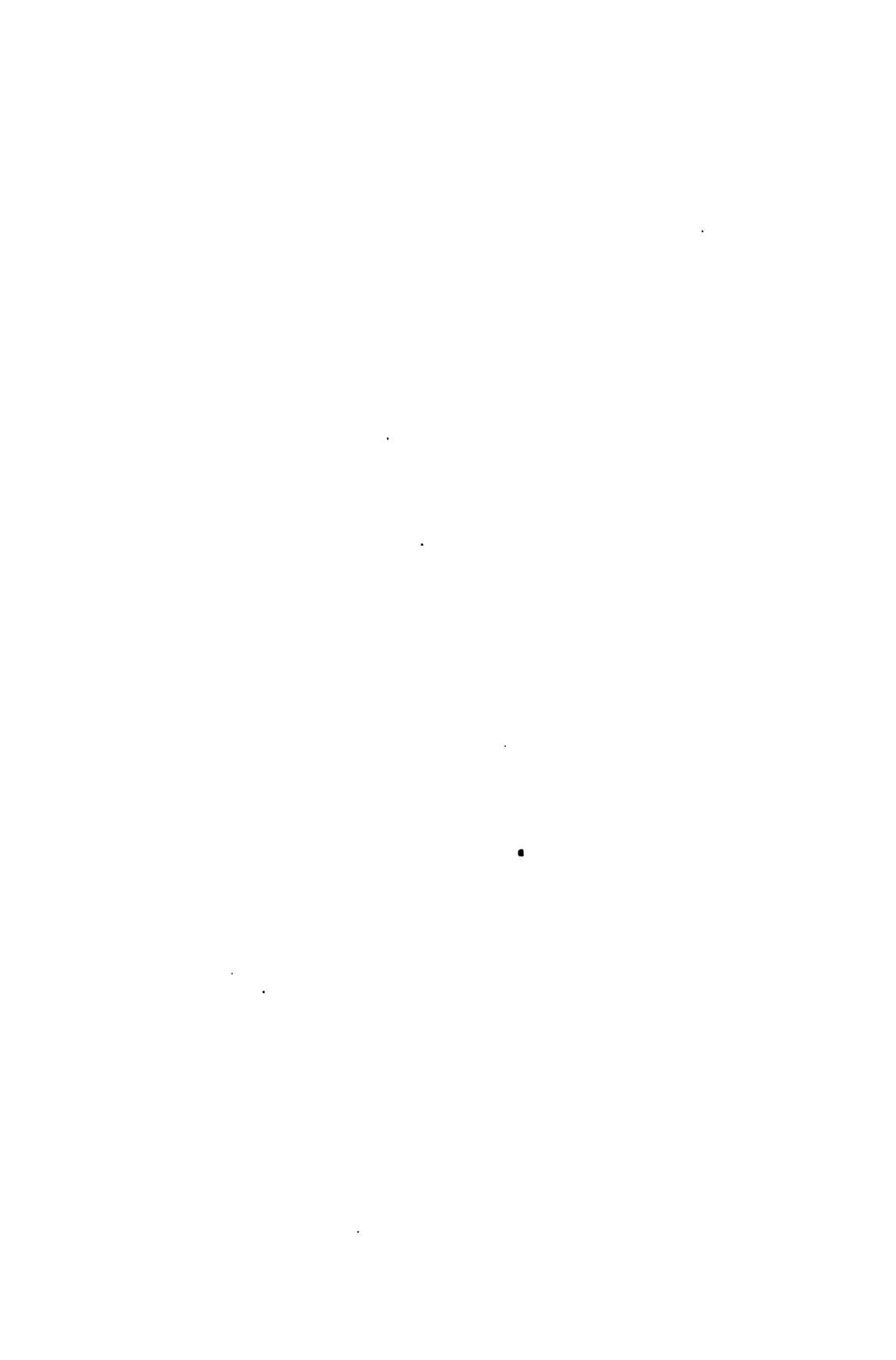
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FRIEND AND PASTOR,

CHARLES ABEL MOYSEY.



LECTURE I.

2 PETER iii. 16.

**IN WHICH ARE SOME THINGS HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD,
WHICH THEY THAT ARE UNLEARNED AND UNSTABLE
WREST, AS (THEY DO) ALSO THE OTHER SCRIPTURES,
UNTO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION.**

IT has been our custom, as you well know, my brethren, at this season of the year especially appointed for devotional exercises, to take into consideration in a more especial manner, some of the features of the modern christian character among us. Or sometimes, as for the two or three seasons of Lent last passed, I have endeavoured to turn to an eminent example of the primitive days, and to draw by comparison from thence that reproof, and correction, and instruction in righteousness, of which it has seemed to me that we at this time stand most in need.

The labours of St. Paul, his journeyings, and perils, and sufferings, his zeal for God, and his charity for man; his boldness in the cause of truth, and with all that, his humility; his desire also, insomuch as was consistent with the preaching of the truth, to avoid offence: these have been set, so far as I have been able to do it, before you, and impressed upon you. Example is the plainest form in which instruction can be conveyed, and if we will not take it when thus placed before us, grievous indeed will be the account, that must be rendered up in the last day, for having received the grace of God, in vain.

But his example, and his precept, ought ever to go hand in hand. Now there is not perhaps in the whole volume of the New Testament, one book to be found, in which the precept has been more frequently perverted through misunderstanding, than his epistle to the Romans. His personal conduct will indeed, it is true, often furnish an excellent commentary on the doctrines which he therein imparts to his

converts. His writings themselves will, moreover, frequently explain the difficulties which therein are found—but still they remain a stumbling-block to many.

Ask yourselves, my brethren, fairly and honestly, how often and how diligently, are care and attention applied, to the searching out of the difficulties which appear, on the face of all the epistles of St. Paul, more or less: but of this to the Romans more especially? Every one has heard in the service of the church, different portions of that epistle; and most persons, as I should hope, have given at least, some attention to it at home.

But as to that part which is heard in the public service; it is necessarily so short, as to be on very many occasions separated from other matters, though they be connected with it, and though upon them it must depend in these instances, principally, for explanation. And as for the private studies of many, even seriously minded and well disposed christians, in their own secret chamber; every one knows

how little able are very many of them, to look for help into the many treasures of sacred learning; though they may be found, and searched with advantage, by the diligent and competently learned.

And besides them does not another class exist, who read as a matter of formal daily duty, but without much pains taken to understand? Are there not those to be found, who prescribe to themselves the reading of a portion in the word of God, as a regular task; but pass on indifferently, whether they have, or have not, perceived the sense of it? And do they not forget how nearly the same in spirit theirs is, with the ritual, formal service of those, who present themselves in the house of God to hear, or it may be, to repeat their part, in forms of devotion, of the import of which they scarcely think at all? Yet all know how vain is such sort of worship: surely then a very little consideration must make them perceive, that equally vain, equally fruitless, must be the reading of scripture; when difficulties are

hurried over, and that information which such passages might convey, is wilfully cast aside.

It is in the hope of giving to the young, and to those who have not the means and opportunities for close enquiry, some aid; as well as to them who have not hitherto felt the disposition, though they may now be awakened to a desire, fully to understand the word of God; that I now propose to attempt the examination of this very important, and by no means easy book, the epistle of St. Paul to the Romans. And I trust, by God's grace, that my diligent endeavours, weak and very imperfect as they must needs be, may be enabled to benefit some among those, who draw near in sincerity, to the study of that very instructive portion of the revealed word.

But before we enter upon the examination of the epistle itself, it may be well to make a few remarks on the style, and particular manner, of St. Paul's writing; for out of that, much of the difficulty which his epistle presents, will be found to arise.

St. Paul may be considered as the most copious writer of any, whom the volume of the New Testament presents to us. The same zeal, the same earnestness and vigour, which we have remarked in all the course of his conduct, displays itself also in his writing. And there was nothing which should make him afraid to exercise, and exhibit, those qualities. He was not one who feared to engage himself in any matter which opponents might present, in the way of objection to his reasoning, or of contradiction to his declarations. Well versed in the Greek philosophers and poets, he evidently was. Thoroughly instructed, by especial revelation also in the doctrines of the faith which he taught, he feared no want of information on that essential point. Thoroughly informed by the same supernatural means, in the history of our Blessed Saviour's life, and teaching, which he alone among the Apostles had not personally witnessed; he felt himself to be, as he said,* "not a whit behind the very

* 2 Cor. xi. 5. and xii. 11.

chiefest of them." And when the discussion was provoked by Jews, or by those who sought still to press the rites of the law of Moses on the christian believer; who so well informed in the sacred scriptures, and in the traditions of the Pharisees themselves, as St. Paul? He had been born a Jew; bred a Pharisee; and educated at the feet of Gamaliel, the great rabbinical teacher of his day. He was therefore, as well he might be, a fearless and a powerful advocate for christianity, alike to learned and unlearned; alike to Jew and Gentile.

Let his pains however, taken during his retirement of two years in Arabia, in order thoroughly to learn from the Holy Spirit the doctrines which he was to teach,* be a pattern to us, of industry and application. Let them prompt us *throughly* to learn, and not to issue crude and hasty conceptions of our own, upon any idea of knowledge suddenly and summarily acquired.

* Gal. i. 12.

St. Paul was called by miracle. He testified at once, immediately, and boldly, in Damascus, his own newly adopted faith in christianity. But he presumed not to preach it, untill he had been much more thoroughly instructed. He was qualified by all the learning of his day, both Jewish and Heathen; yet he did not suffer conceit of himself to arise on that account. He employed all the means of each sort, which could be made to apply to the conversion of the Jews and Gentiles; and yet with all his gifts, he never forgot the necessity for humility.

For though he was well stored with learning, and knew its value; though he was able to apply it, when and where it would be most serviceable; yet we find no shew of it in his epistles—rather there might appear something like a total disregard of form and order in argument, to those who read him but hastily. But it will be to them alone; for he is not negligent. He sacrifices method indeed; that is to say, the method which was adopted by

those who studied elegance in their writings.
But he wrote not disorderly.

There was a preference, which his mind gave to some matters over others; and for the sake of it he suffered them to break in just where the subject suggested them; and often to interrupt the thread of his discourse. But though the reader may sometimes lose sight of the leading subject, when a long interruption has turned his thoughts another way; yet the Apostle never did so. There was no inattention to his matter in him; and he invariably returns to it, even after the longest digressions.

A style like his, is not mentioned as one which we should do well to imitate. But his language and manner of writing are not the points proposed for our imitation. These peculiarities are mentioned, to help us in attaining to the meaning of St. Paul's epistles, and to make us aware how great is the care, and how close the attention, which must be applied to them, if we would avoid the danger of being

among those “unlearned and unstable,” of whom St. Peter speaks,* who “wrest them to their own destruction.”

The Apostle warns those to whom he writes,† that “his preaching is not with enticing words of man’s wisdom.” He tells them thus,‡ “I came to you not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, &c. (that is, not with worldly skill, and science, and forms of oratory), for I determined not to know any thing among you, (not to rely, or rest my argument on any thing) save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

There was an energy in the Apostle’s mind, which when united with those his avowed system, naturally led him to overlook some of those common rules, which render writings more perspicuous. He was full of the matter which he was earnest to impress upon his hearers; and he poured it forth in that abundance, which introduces subordinate subjects in the way of parenthesis, often at such length,

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

+ 1 Cor. ii. 4. ‡ ib. 1. 2.

that it requires no small attention to observe the point, at which he returns to his original discourse.

Yet he does, as I have already observed, invariably so return. But a careless reader will not perceive this, because such parentheses are sometimes only partially marked, sometimes not at all, in our version. And therefore, to them who read in haste, or without due application of mind, or in short portions only; to them St. Paul's epistles are not a proper subject for their private, unassisted reading. Yet the fault (be it remembered), is in them and not in him. Pains are the price appointed for almost every thing of value. They will not labour for the meat which nourisheth unto *everlasting* life: while for worldly concerns, and even worldly trifles, they *will* take pains willingly; and bestow on them more than sufficient attention. "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, *his* servants ye are whom ye obey."* And we

* Rom. vi. 16.

ourselves must shew, whether we trust most in the revealed word of God, by his Apostles and Prophets; or whether in the rules, and precepts, and maxims, of a thoughtless and ungodly generation.

St. Paul is the most copious, in his epistles, of any among the inspired writers. The inspiration (it must be recollectcd) which was upon them, was *strictly* according to our Blessed Saviour's promise; and went no farther. He never assured them, that any supernatural guidance should give them the graces of style, or purity of language. But he promised that "He the Spirit of Truth (should) guide them into all truth, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them."*

But in respect of abundance and richness,

* Εκείνος το Πνεύμα της αληθείας, a strong argument, by the way it may be observed, for the personality of the Holy Ghost arises from the masculine pronoun thus used with the neuter substantive, and it is one which cannot easily, if at all, be overborne.

on the one hand, or of dryness of expression, on the other, they were left to themselves and to their own previously acquired manners. And so it was, as to the energy, or quietness of their language. It partook of the natural temperament of the man, and was not governed, as the narration of matter of fact, and the declaration of christian doctrine were, by the Holy Ghost, whose influence was upon the Apostles.

Thus the sudden breaking off from the leading subject, into other matter which was suggested at the moment; in which the chief difficulty of St. Paul's style consists; belonging to the fervent temper of the man. He was eager to press the important point, so soon as it occurred to him, and was utterly regardless of the rules of composition in his epistles.

But he never lost sight, nevertheless, of that on which he was principally discoursing. He always returned to it, though sometimes not till after a considerable interval. It is this circumstance, (and it therefore must be repeatedly impressed), which makes it dangerous

to rest, in *any point of doctrine*, on short passages of *his epistles*. Frequently they cannot be well understood, without taking a great deal together. Frequently, not without utterly overlooking the separation of chapters and verses, which regard for modern convenience at first occasioned. It must be recollectcd, that neither chapters nor verses, no, nor even stops, were in use at all when the epistles were written. The sense alone marked the period; and the comparison of one part with another, led to the true sense. The stops were inserted afterwards, merely on man's judgment: they have been often changed, and so may they be at any time.

The division into chapters and verses was also made by uninspired man; and merely for convenience sake. But unfortunately it has been done sometimes, to the effect of cutting off the connection of things which belong to each other; and thus the sense, and meaning, has been perplexed by them.

These few remarks, are not intended to

convey a complete desription of St. Paul's method, and style in writing. For that, Mac-knight's preliminary essay to his commentary on the epistles, may be consulted with much advantage; as well as various other authors. But these things are stated as necessary with a view to preparing those among my congregation who are not practised in the study of these sacred letters, for the peculiarities of writing, which will occur as we proceed.

The epistle to the Romans was written probably about the year of our Lord fifty-eight; which was the fourth year of the reign of Nero. It was before St. Paul had ever been at Rome; and much a longer time before St. Peter was there. But there were christian converts in considerable numbers in that city, and to them he addressed himself.

Nor could it indeed be otherwise. That great metropolis of the empire, sent forth its inhabitants into all lands, and received into itself strangers from all lands. We read of strangers of Rome on the day of Pentecost, at

Jerusalem;* when the Holy Spirit first fell upon the Apostles. We read before that, of the Centurion at Jerusalem, who was greatly moved, if he was not converted, by the circumstances of our Lord's crucifixion; and who would naturally have spoken of them, and of his feelings and conviction on the occasion, when he should have returned to Rome. And the case of the other Centurion Cornelius,† who actually became a christian, is well known.

That event had occurred in the year of our Lord forty-one; which was full seventeen years before the writing of this epistle. It is well known how widely the christian religion had spread in the dominions of the Romans, during that time; and that it had been embraced by many persons of rank, and of some consequence. It was therefore to be expected, that it should be found in the capital; to which those Centurions would have returned, as well as the strangers of Rome, who had witnessed the

* Acts ii. 10, 41.

† Acts. x.

miraculous gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost.

Thither the constant resort of persons of every description from the provinces, would of course bring the opinions which prevailed in the places from whence they came; and that there were many christian converts among them is not to be doubted. The last chapter of this very epistle, is enough to prove it; though it be a matter of some uncertainty whether any one had yet preached the faith in Christ, as an Apostle, in that city, and the presumption is much against any such thing. St. Paul had not yet been there, and much less had St. Peter, who followed and did not precede him.

And this is a point of some importance in these latter days. For the whole claim of spiritual supremacy, which the church of Rome has for twelve hundred years advanced, is grounded on the idea that St. Peter was their *first* bishop, and that to him pre-eminence had been given by our Lord above his fellow Apostles.

Now it is not to our present purpose, to enter on that question of pre-eminence at length. It is sufficient to direct your attention to this one circumstance; viz. that the power of binding and loosing, (whatever the terms might signify), was not exclusively conferred on him; but was, in quite as strong terms given to *all* the Apostles,* just before our Lord's resurrection. As to the special charge then given to St. Peter, three times, to feed the sheep, it was in fact a reproach. It was connected with the threefold enquiry, concerning Peter's love, which had been exposed to doubt, by his threefold denial of his master. It was therefore the evidence required, to prove the love which he professed.

St. Paul not only wrote this epistle in the year fifty-seven or fifty-eight, but was at Rome from the year sixty-one to sixty-three; St. Peter was never there till sixty-four or sixty-five; and then St. Paul was there again also;

* John xx. 23.

and also, together with St. Peter, there suffered martyrdom.

There was, then, manifestly a christian church; that is, a community or fraternity of christians, at Rome, when St. Paul wrote this epistle; and before his first abode in that city. And it is well known as such; for he observes in commendation of them, that their "faith was spoken of throughout the world;"* which expression always means the limits of the Roman empire when it is used in the epistles.

It is clear also, that before the writing of this epistle, there were christians established at Rome. This appears not merely from the probability of the thing, for the reasons already given; but from the various salutations, which occupy the sixteenth chapter. And among them we find mention expressly made, of two, who were converted before St. Paul himself. "Andronicus and Junia" (are his words) "my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who were

* Rom. i. 8.

of note among the Apostles, who were also in Christ before me.”*

Of the state of the christian church, at the time when St. Paul wrote to the Romans, it is necessary that some notice should here be taken; though it must be more particularly mentioned, as the passages shall lead to it, during our course. Christianity was, (as he himself says), “to the Jews, a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks, foolishness.” The one resisted it, because it interferred with their prejudices; the others despised it, because it came not to them clothed in subtily of argument, nor resting on the wisdom of philosophy.

The Jews relied on their own election, as the chosen people of God. As such, they had been admitted into the first covenant, by the ministration of Moses, and were therefore zealous for *that* law. But it was not that they were studious to uphold the *purity* which it

* Rom. xvi. 7.

taught: their object was to maintain the pre-eminence which it gave to themselves, and to feed their pride with the idea of it. They found, that many of the Apostles' precepts, as well as our Lord's, were against the sense which the Scribes and Pharisees forced upon the law; and still more, against the traditions which they claimed a right to add to that law, under pretence of making it more complete. In this last particular, viz. the setting up of their tradition above the Holy Scriptures, we must remember, that one church among christians, namely that of Rome, has but too closely imitated them. The Apostles, and the council at Jerusalem, had resolved, that the Gentile converts were not to be required to keep the ritual law. And therefore the unbelieving Jews in almost every place, took up the most decided enmity against them, and against the doctrine which they taught.

The very converts also from among the *Jews*, frequently held no small portion of those same prejudices. They diligently sought to impress

this persuasion on the Gentiles who believed, that it was still necessary that they should be circumcised, and keep the law. This was no small hindrance to the progress of the Gospel; and therefore St. Paul in this epistle (as well as in two others, namely, to the Galatians and Hebrews), set himself expressly to overthrow that pernicious idea.

And so he opposes here in like manner, the doctrine of any limitation of God's favour to one chosen people, under the Christian, as it had been limited under the Mosaic dispensation.

We shall find as we proceed, that the favourite arguments both of Jews and Greeks (to use the common expression of the New Testament) are answered and overthrown in this epistle. We shall find it distinctly shown, that salvation was not to be attained by the rites of the Law of Moses; nor yet by the wisdom of philosophy, refining on the law of nature. Christianity alone is set forth as the head and the fountain, from whence only man

can attain to the enjoyment of divine favour, and of everlasting life.

Having thus stated whatever may be adviseable to be mentioned, in order to make the object of St. Paul's writing in this epistle, clear; we will in the succeeding lectures, endeavour to explain the difficulties, and to enforce the doctrines, which will occur in our progress through it. The matter before us is of a nature most highly instructive. It abounds as much as any book in the whole inspired volume, in doctrine of sound christianity: and is profitable also for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

May He from whom proceeds all light and all knowledge, give me grace to explain the difficulties; and incline us all to profit duly, by the godly wisdom with which this epistle abounds! So shall we have no cause to lament the pains bestowed, and the attention here applied; but be builded up firmly and steadily, in wisdom and godly knowledge. And so may we, through the grace of God, be able to draw

nearer (to use the same Apostle's expression), "to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;" till we be found worthy through his infinite mercy shown forth on our diligent, but still frail endeavours, to be received as his faithful servants, into his everlasting kingdom.

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centred out from the left side of the
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LECTURE II. *and*
by a second fragment extending *to the right* and *below*
extending *out* *of* *the* *fragment* *given* *above*.

ROMANS i. 7. *and*

**TO ALL THAT BE IN ROME, BELOVED OF GOD, CALLED TO
BE SAINTS; GRACE TO YOU, AND PEACE, FROM GOD
OUR FATHER, AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

THE Apostle opens his epistle with a short declaration of his calling as an Apostle, to preach the gospel, and good tidings of salvation. Such, that is to say, good tidings, is the meaning of the Greek word;* and such is that of the Saxon word gospel, by which we have translated it. He then proceeds, in the same style which he was accustomed to use, to bless the converts to whom he writes; “Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

* ευαγγελια.

But when I say, that he proceeds in the style which he was accustomed to use, it may perhaps occasion surprise to some, who have always been used to consider this epistle as the first of those which he wrote. So it stands indeed in order of place, but it does not so stand in order of time. The two to the Thessalonians, which are placed the last in our Bibles, were the first written. That which is addressed to the Galatians, was the next, and the two to the Corinthians followed. All of them preceded this to the Romans.

But the order of time was not consulted in arranging this part of the canon of the New Testament. This epistle was addressed to the capital of the world, and therefore had precedence allotted to it: there was in general no necessary connection between the epistles to different places; and therefore it was not deemed necessary to observe the order of the time, in which they were composed and sent.

This epistle was written from Corinth, about

the year of our Lord fifty-eight, which was the fourth of the Emperor Nero. It was addressed, as indeed were all the other epistles, not to unbelievers, but to converts.

And it must be recollectcd, that in those days the means of multiplying an epistle by printing, did not exist. It was a matter of some difficulty and expense, to obtain copies of writings: and as the heathen, generally speaking, cared but little about the christian doctrine, it had been useless to address to them exhortations, to the hearing, or reading of which, the greater part of them could never have been expected to come.

But the converts to christianity, read or heard those Apostolic letters, in the places wherein they were used to assemble for divine worship. Through those christian converts, it could not but be the case, that some knowledge of the doctrines on which the writer insisted, should find its way among the Gentiles, with whom the Jewish and Gentile converts at Rome and elsewhere had inter-

course. Though addressed to the latter, they were therefore probably written with some view to all.

The Jews at Rome had shown themselves to be a violent, and a turbulent people; and great had been the quarrels among them between the converted and the unconverted in that city. The Roman historian of those times, Suetonius, records the fact of their disturbances; while with the contempt which was usually expressed for that now fallen nation, he does not take the trouble of enquiring any thing precisely, as to the matter in dispute between them. He speaks as if Christ himself had been at that time in Rome, and the leader of a riotous mob; for in mentioning the acts of the emperor Cladius, he says,* "He expelled from Rome the Jews who at the instigation of Chrestus were always making disturbances."

That expulsion of them is mentioned in the acts of the Apostles:† Aquila, a Jew of Pontus,

* *Judeos impulsore Chresti assidue tumultuantes Romam expulsit.* (Claudius, c. 25).

† xviii. 2.

and his wife Priscilla, were of the number of those who were thus banished from the capital; and they went to Corinth, where they met St. Paul.

It could hardly fail to occur, that they should inform him of the state of things in the place from whence they had come; and of the disputes which ran to so great a height there, upon the question of the ceremonial obligations of the law of Moses; as binding or not binding on Jews converted to christianity. They could not but have mentioned those claims of high supremacy, which the Jews still maintained; and their unwillingness to admit that the Gentiles could become equally acceptable with themselves. And this accounts for the knowledge which the epistle shews of the state of the people at Rome, who interested themselves on either side, in the dispute between the converts and the Jews.

When Aquila and Priscilla first came to Corinth from Rome, their countrymen had been driven out from thence, and dispersed.

But we must remember that this epistle was not written at the time of the expulsion, which was in the year fifty-one, but in the year fifty-seven or fifty-eight; when many of them might very probably have collected there again.

Other matters are touched in this epistle beside the disputes of Jews and Christians; but they may best be mentioned when we come to them in their place.

The epistle begins with a declaration of the Apostle's kind, and christian disposition, toward those to whom he writes.* He declares that he had often intended to visit them,† but had been prevented by other duties, for which the Holy Spirit had called him to other places. He declares that he considers himself their debtor,|| that is to say, bounden as the Apostle of the *Gentiles*, to exert himself for their spiritual welfare. And it was probably for that reason, that he explained in the course of this epistle, so much of that, which it was very

* i. 9.

† 13 v.

|| 14 v.

essential for *Gentiles* to learn; though the Jews knew it, or ought to have known it, already, that is to say, so much of God's dealings with man in reference to the life to come.

But here, in the very opening, an instance has occurred, of that peculiarity of style, which belongs, in so many instances, as I observed in my last lecture, to St. Paul's epistles; and which, more perhaps than any one other thing, tends to render them almost unintelligible to the *careless* reader. Here is in the original Greek, a parenthesis implied at the beginning of the second verse; and within that there is another in the middle of the third, and to the end of the fourth verse; for that first parenthesis runs to the conclusion of the sixth verse. In our version, the transposition of a few words has made it all run in one parenthesis; from the beginning of the second to the end of the sixth verse. But that, occurring as it does, at the very opening of the epistle, plainly shews, that the rules of composition were not studied by the Apostles. It shews that he brought in

the matter which occurred, just as his ideas suggested themselves to him; though, as was before observed, without ever losing sight of his main subject. Of that however, the careless readers, or they who dwell on short detached passages, will, in consequence of that very habit of his writing, be *very* likely to lose sight: but they will lose sight also, together with it, of the true import of that which was intended to be expressed. The example has occurred instantly, at the very outset of our undertaking; and therefore I take advantage of it, again to impress upon you all, my brethren, the absolute necessity for caution, and through examination of the *whole*, in all the scriptures, but above all in those epistles of St. Paul.

He begins, as I have observed, with excusing himself for not having preached at Rome. It might indeed have been expected, that the Apostle of the Gentiles should not neglect the principal city of the Gentiles; and therefore he tells them of his desire to have visited them.

He admits that he is their debtor;* that he owed them a visit of instruction, to establish them in the faith; and he professes his readiness to acquit himself of that debt, and to preach the gospel even in Rome itself.†

Yet Rome was in no respect then, a place of safety for a christian teacher. At all times it was filled with heathen idolatries, and ungodly living; but at that time in particular, that scourge of humanity, the tyrant Nero, occupied the imperial throne. But St. Paul shrank back from nothing which duty called him to perform. He did not, as too many among us often do, profess a readiness to do things which they feel that they ought to have done; and declare their sorrow for having been prevented from doing them. But he sought really and heartily for the opportunity; and when it was found, he readily embraced it. He did so on two occasions; the first of which involved him in imprisonment, and the second ended in his martyrdom.

* 14 v. † 15 v.

And now we enter upon the real subject of the epistle. The argument begins with setting forth the offence of the Gentiles, in having perverted that light of conscience, which the Holy Ghost inspires into the hearts of all men. And this is so set forth for two reasons; first, and most manifestly, to persuade those Gentiles themselves to examine their own ways, and to see the folly and wickedness of them; that so they might return to the true and only God, through Jesus Christ.

But secondly, the Apostle turns his reasoning to the Jews; he convinces *them* of sin, equally with the heathens whom they despised. He proves that they had no claim any longer to a continuance of those exclusive privileges, which the favour of God had, for his wise purposes, so long bestowed upon them alone.

"I am not ashamed (writes he) of the gospel of Christ." He was under no feeling of shame, which should deter him from teaching, to a proud and haughty city; a city which was the seat of many learned, and of more powerful

men, most of whom held the Jews, and all their doctrine, in utter contempt—he was not ashamed even before them, of publishing the gospel of Christ. Shall we then be ashamed, of avowing that we act upon christian principle? We, who dwell in a land where the faith of our Lord is professed; and all which he inculcated, is, at least so far as words will go, declared to demand the utmost deference, and respect, and obedience? Shall we, because an evil custom may prevail of refusing to submit to the restraints and mortifications, which the christian law imposes on human passions and worldly indulgencies; shall we presume to follow the multitude here; and neglect through fear of their reproach, the duties which we owe to Him, in whom alone we can have sound hope?

Let not that false shame, which too often keeps back the young and the timid from virtuous exertions, be permitted to prevail here in a christian country; where the mockery of those who follow an evil fashion, is the worst which the servant of God, generally speaking,

has to dread. St. Paul was not ashamed of his reproached, and calumniated, and threatened, religion, even amidst pagan Rome. Let us then, like him, not “be afraid of their terror, neither be dismayed; but sanctify the Lord God,” not only in our hearts, but before the eyes, alike of friends and foes. Let us recollect, aye never forget, our Blessed Saviour’s awful saying, “He that shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and of his Father’s, with the holy Angels.”

From hence St. Paul proceeds to declare, that the gospel “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” He declares openly that it is offered to all, though the offer was first made to the Jew. Yet of the gospel be it remembered, that no such thing is said as that it was exclusively to be given, after the manner of the old law, to any one people.

Nor does he teach that the mere profession of belief, is to be accompanied by any favourable exertion of the power of God. He does not say that it is so, to every one that merely declares that he believes; but that it is to him that indeed believeth. To them who proceed from faith to faith; who carry forward their faith, and make it by daily exercise, more and more strong, and more and more fruitful: to them, that is to the just and righteous livers, it is promised that they shall live by faith. But it is expressly said, lest any should build falsely on the assurance of salvation attributed to faith; it is expressly said, that mere speculative faith shall save none. It is distinctly declared, that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all "who hold the truth," if they hold it "in unrighteousness."

What blindness is it then, with this scripture before us, to rest upon names and professions; on baptism on the one hand, or imaginary sensations on the other; without real and practical righteousness! For to Christians by profession

it may be applied full as well, as to the Pagans; whom it is probable the Apostle had chiefly in view, when he thus wrote. Let us remember, my brethren, that having lived under the light of the gospel, as we have lived since our earliest knowledge; if we be convicted by our own conscience, of needing that admonition, which was directed towards those unenlightened Pagans; we have need to fear, lest "the name of our Saviour be blasphemed among the Gentiles," through our deviation from that law, in which we profess that we are serving, and following him.

The Apostle now proceeds to convince the *Gentile Romans*, that they were without excuse, for all those ungodly acts which many among them were accustomed to commit. He admonishes them, that they, and all mankind, had the law of God written on their hearts; whereby conscience gave them warning in all matters, wherein their own evil habits had not extinguished the light of conscience. He rebukes their idolatries, whereby they insulted that

great one God, who though invisible in himself, was ever visible in his works.* The argument which he uses here (it is found in the twentieth verse), is precisely the same as that which he used to the men of Lystra: when speaking of the Almighty, he said, “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons; filling our hearts with food and gladness.”† So says he here. But to make the passage more clear, I again set back a short parenthesis, to the end of the period. “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world, even his eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen; being understood (or to be understood) by the things that are made.” Then he proceeds to charge them with all the gross folly of their idolatry, as arising from their conceit of their worldly wisdom, and their neglect to attend to divine revelation.

It is the same motive which is imputed to

* 20 v.

† Acts xiv. 17.

the Jews; it excited in the one people, hard-hearted infidelity; and in the other, the blind worship of superstition, devised according to their own conceits. "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* Still does the same cause produce the same effect, and that under the name and outward cover even of christianity.

On this state of man, acting under the influence of his own feelings and impulses, and without controul or guidance, from divine revelation, the Apostle dwells to the end of this first chapter. He argues that the abandoned state of unenlightened man, arose not from any absolute decree of divine displeasure, but from their own evil dispositions; which had led them to turn away from Him; from that Lord, whom originally all had known, and acknowledged.

* Rom. x. 3.

They, says he, "changed the truth of God into a lie, &c.* They themselves (says he) did thus. It was the abuse which they made of their own free will; that blessed gift, through which they had it put in their power to have purchased life immortal. They did not like to retain God in knowledge: and therefore were they abandoned to their own inventions; to a source of evil, than which none can be found, which more assuredly leads towards destruction.

The charge is made on that ground (if we look accurately into the words here used by St. Paul), which establishes this important truth: namely, that the failure of attaining to salvation, whenever men do so fail, is the work of their own evil dispositions and habits; and is not the arbitrary ordinance of God. For there is something very remarkable in the Apostle's expressions, which is here rendered, "They did not like † to retain God in

* 25 v.

† σκ εδοκιμασου

their knowledge;" as there is also in that which answers to it; "God gave them over to a reprobate mind:"* and it is one which I believe, is not unfrequently misunderstood.

Now the words here translated, "like" and "reprobate," (in, "they did not *like* to retain God in their knowledge;" and "God gave them over to a reprobate mind") are, in the original Greek, words which answer to each other. It is as if it were rendered, they did not "prove," or try by a test, literally; and in the other place it is, "an unproved," that is, an unsound mind, or habit of thinking.

The original words have in their primitive signification, reference, the one to the trying of gold by way of ascertaining its purity; and the other to the state of the metal which cannot abide the test. The Apostle is using them, not with any view to that which is commonly called reprobation; which is an absolute decree of condemnation, supposed by mistaken

* αδοκημον ουν

persons, to have been passed by the Almighty against particular persons, without fault on their part to call for it. He talks of a reprobate mind, in opposition to a proving, that is, an examining mind. He rebukes the heathen, their learned men, and philosophers; because their own conceit of their abilities and knowledge, had led them to frame a system of idolatry, degrading to God. He reproaches them because their own faculties, if rightly employed, could have perceived that he was at least, something superior to those idols before whom they worshipped, or to the deities represented by them.

For those deities were debased, according to the heathen mythology, by most of the worst crimes which man can commit. The people however took up that senseless worship, even as they found it. They did not prove it, so as to retain the proper idea of a pure and holy God, in their knowledge. And therefore the Almighty gave them over to a reprobate, that is, an unimproving mind. He gave them

over to the consequences which such a deceived and foul representation of the Deity would naturally, and did actually, produce in them; namely, that they "should do those things which are not convenient," that is to say, not becoming, decent, or proper. It is a sense in which the word "convenient" is often used; as for instance in St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient,"* that is, not suited to the condition of Christians.

The first portion of our consideration on this epistle, may well enough stop here: with the censure thus passed on the self-conceited, and yet spiritually-ignorant, of the wise men among the heathen: wise, but only according to the wisdom of this world. We shall presently see how St. Paul leads on the argument, from them to the Jews. But it is more to our purpose to employ the short space which yet remains on this occasion, to considerations

*Eph. v. 4.

which are directly applicable to our own condition, and circumstances.

Look then, my brethren, at the character which he there gives, of those who went astray from God, and followed their own depraved imaginations. Consider also the causes, to which he ascribes that evil doing, namely their neglect, in not duly looking through those, which are called the works of nature, upward to the God of nature. To that he first imputes their error; and then their self-conceited pretensions to a philosophy which should account for every thing, by which that error was fatally confirmed.

And is nothing of the same sort to be found now, among ourselves, in this land? Are there none of those followers of science, falsely so called, who professing themselves to be wise, have become fools? Are there none, who presume to estimate other sciences far before the knowledge of God, and of that which he requires of man? Before our knowledge of our utter inability, as of ourselves; and of the

courses of living which shall render us acceptable to that Mediator, through whom alone our unworthiness can ever hope for acceptance?

Nay, are there none in this land, who presume to doubt, and hesitate, about the things which divine revelation *alone could* possibly make known; namely those which belong to the nature of the Almighty himself; and to the whole of the most merciful, though equally incomprehensible scheme, the scheme of man's redemption?

Too surely such there are. And the vanity of affecting superior wisdom, will constantly betray the self-conceited into that egregious folly, of thinking themselves equal to judge of the hidden things of God, because they know perhaps more than the general mass of their fellows, of matters of earthly speculation, and experimental philosophy.

I say not this to deprecate such studies; but to suggest, that the wisdom of the works ought to lead us to admire, and to bow down

in humble submission, before the great and omnipotent artificer of them. So did they, among the wisest whom the history of our country has left recorded, for the imitation of posterity. So did Bacon and Locke; so did Newton and Boyle. They possessed intellects with which few can cope, if any such there be at all among us; but which never dared to cavil at the wisdom of Almighty God.

Here then, for the present, we must conclude. May He from whom alone cometh wisdom and understanding, give us grace to know that "before honour is humility." May he teach us to submit ourselves in every thing, to all which tends to his honour and service. Nor can we better conclude, than in the words of a collect* from our excellent book of common prayer. "O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; grant unto thy people, that they

* 4th Sunday after Easter.

may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise : that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The peace of God, &c.

THE PEACE OF GOD, &c.
A SERMON
BY JAMES THOMAS,
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ENGLAND,
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LECTURE III.

ROMANS ii. 2.

THINKEST THOU THIS, O MAN, THAT JUDGEST THEM
WHICH DO SUCH THINGS, AND DOEST THE SAME;
THAT THOU SHALT ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT OF
GOD?

THE question before us comes now to the condition of the *Jew*, in St. Paul's day; and naturally follows that consideration of the iniquity of the Gentiles, with which we closed the last lecture. He had then urged the obligations, which arose from the light of conscience; that inward evidence which all possessed, till they had for themselves extinguished it. He had urged, I say, that obligation, as lying on the Gentile Romans, even without any knowledge of the Revelations of God's will.

To this the Jewish converts would readily enough assent, though their feeling would be very different, when he turned round, as it were, upon themselves, as he does in the opening of the second chapter. Such is the natural feeling of mankind; ready enough to perceive the misdoing, which perverts the ways of others; but seldom ready to acknowledge the same in themselves. Pride, under whatever disguise it may be found, is ever the most effectual, the most fatal hindrance, to the admission of any salutary self-conviction. It can see, and perhaps applaud, that which is good; so it can perceive, and censure the evil, when not shewn in our own instance. But when the actual offender is charged with misconduct, then the heart is hardened against self-knowledge; and the evil is permitted to continue, that it may not be confessed to have been an evil.

The Apostle had, skilfully as it seems, first drawn the attention of the Jews to

the severe censure which he here passes, on the vain, though philosophizing, Gentiles. Suddenly he turns to themselves; and rebukes them, because with greater advantages than the Gentiles, they had fallen into the same vices with them. He shews them that they had no right to condemn others, who did no worse than they had done; though their own means of serving God truly, had been so infinitely superior.

He touches not here, on that which was so odious to the Jews, namely the abrogation of the ritual law, in which they were used to make their boast, because the possession of it had once marked them for the chosen people of God. But he convinces them of sin, even under their own particular privilege. He allows a certain precedence to them; “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek,” (that is to say, “the Gentile”). But it is a precedence of no avail, to those who had not taken advantage of the opportunity, which the early revelations of the

divine will had given to the Jews. He announces that in his day, eternal life was the reward proposed to the well-doer in general; and condemnation, wrath, and anguish, to every soul of man that doeth evil. The righteous judgment of God is (as he says), to "render unto every man according to his deeds,"* for "there is no respect of persons with God."†

It may seem to those who but loosely view the matter, that this declaration, "there is no respect of persons with God," is inconsistent with the especial election, and particular privileges, granted as we all know, to the Jews. But there are two considerations which must be set against that idea. The first is, that speaking of mankind in general, as they came from the Creator's hand, the case *was* strictly thus. For where do we read of the election of any particular people, till the days of Abraham?

* Rom. ii. 6.

† 11 v.

Cain and his posterity were cast out; but it was for the sinfulness of the father, continued by the children. From Noah came three sons, who stood all equally well as to their prospects; until the wickedness of the one, cast him and his posterity behind that of his two brethren. Then came the dispersion of their children at Babel; and then, if not before, idolatry seems to have found its way among them.

The Patriarchs from Abraham downward, were distinguished by their worship of the one God. Abraham was born only two thousand and four years after the creation; or three hundred and forty-three years subsequent to the deluge. Yet even then he was called out from those among whom he dwelt, in order to preserve the worship of the true God in his own family. And when Jacob afterward returned to his relations, Laban the brother of his mother (who had herself been the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew), had idols; concerning which

a question arose with Jacob, because Rachaël had taken them away with her.

There was therefore no respect of persons in the *original* purposes of God. Man in general turned away from the Lord; but the Lord did not originally turn away, in any degree from him. He chose indeed the posterity of his faithful servants to preserve in him the true worship of his holy name: but that was an act of mercy, not of arbitrary severity. Often as that nation offended, and turned away from him, yet for their forefather's sake, he never cast them off. "Where sin abounded, grace did therefore much more abound;" and that, even under the old dispensation.

But there was a second evidence given, that there is no respect of persons with God. It was announced in plain terms repeatedly; and it shall be verified, awfully verified, before the eyes of all in the last day. Every privilege which was granted to the Jew, was for this life only. But in regard to that

which is to come, still was there no respect of persons with God. If the Jew was better informed; it was expected, and required, that he should act the better; that he should act up to his information.

Thus therefore does St. Paul go on in the beginning of this second chapter, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself: for thou that judgest doest the same things." From thence he naturally comes to the declaration, that "there is no respect of persons with God."

Let not us, my brethren, pass lightly on regarding this merely as a censure on the bigotry of the Jews. The Apostle no doubt, directed his expressions first to them. But would he have used such extensive terms, had he not also intended that they should be extensively applied? "O man, whosoever thou art," is a very comprehensive mode of expression, and well shall we do

in applying it every one to him or herself; now, at this season especially appointed for self-examination, and repentance.

Are none here conscious of that self-satisfied disposition? Have none among us ever censured others for disobedience, when we ourselves have done the same things? Have none among us, equally with them, thrown away our advantages, or neglected the pure and proper services of our God; though it may be that a different temptation from theirs, has acted upon us, and therefore has cast us into a different description of transgression?

“Light has come into the world;” and the light, and knowledge of our duty has unquestionably shined on us. But if obedience to that duty be declined, because it mortifies the flesh; and requires that we restrain ourselves from the pursuit of present gratification, and that we purify ourselves in hope of that reward, which He who is pure shall allot to the faithful in his heavenly

Kingdom; it will shine to our condemnation. In that case we shall be like the perverse Jews, who knew the things that are excellent, but did them not. And upon us therefore, in such case, as well as upon them, will that same condemnation most justly fall.

It is well for us, my brethren, born in a christian country, and baptized into the privileges and adoption of the children of God, to bear in mind that which the Apostle here urges so strongly: namely, the increased responsibility, which that increase of privilege brings with it. Where ignorance unavoidably prevails, there, no doubt, allowance will be made for it. But what reason is there for supposing that it will be made, for any deficiency beyond that which absolute necessity has unavoidably so occasioned? There is none whatever.

“As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law.” It is not said that they shall necessarily perish *for* their ignorance, but that their destruction

shall be without any addition of punishment in consideration of the law. And why? The reason is obvious. Because they knew it not; and therefore they ignorantly offended against it. But still it is pronounced that they shall perish, if they offend against the light of conscience within them.

"As many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law." They have had the advantage of farther privileges, and farther knowledge: and they shall be judged for their abuse or improvement of them. It shall be done to both, according to that perfect rule of equity laid down in the holy scriptures, "according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."*

But, be it remembered, that we have, not only a certain positive knowledge in the way that should lead us unto life; but we have also the power of extending that knowledge, and improving the practice which

* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

springs from it. We have them, as necessarily inherent in the degree of information with which we have already been blessed. So says the scripture, "He that hath to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

Who then here shall complain, that the more perfect understanding of the law of God is not extended to them? Ask yourselves, my brethren. May not this arise from our own fault? Have we employed to the very utmost of our powers the means and advantages set before us? Have we drawn back from no exercise of righteousness and temperance? Have none of us sacrificed to the world and its vanities those times, and opportunities, and powers, of whatever different kinds, which all might have been applied to our improvement in the ways of godliness?

Beware my brethren, for our danger is great. Remember that not the hearers of the law, but the doers, are justified before

God. They who so sacrifice to the world the seasons, like this, which are appointed for religious consideration, and religious improvement; prove too plainly, that they hate to be reformed, and have cast the word of salvation behind them.

Before we pass on to the other matter close at hand, which will bring us, (as I trust in God, with some practical improvement), to the conclusion of this lecture; I pause to notice another of those extraordinary parentheses, which to the careless reader so often perplex the reasonings of this Apostle. And this, as you must recollect, is done, not that we may cavil at the Apostle's style, but that the greater care and diligence may be applied to the study of this epistle. The twelfth verse of this second chapter ends with these words, "As many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law." From thence the sense passes on easily enough into the following verse, "For not the hearers of the law are

just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." But when we arrive at the sixteenth verse in this way of reading, it opens with words which have no immediate connection with that verse which preceded it.

"The Gentiles," says the Apostle, "shew the work of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another. In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ."

Such is the way in which the words run. But does the sense also run thus with them? Far from it. The last passage beginning "In the day" has, evidently, no connection directly with the words next before it. But leave out the whole parenthesis, which according to the sense should be marked from the beginning of the thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth verse, and the sense is clear and obvious.

"As many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, &c." The other matter comes in afterward. It is by way of a comment; an application and explanation of the matter; and if considered in this manner it cannot be misunderstood.

Here again then, is a striking instance of the need which we have for much care and caution, to be applied to the writings of St. Paul. So truly did St. Peter say,* that they who are unlearned and unstable, are those who wrest (who pervert), the things in St. Paul's epistles; and that they do it to their own destruction.

The Apostle has stated the equal and just method, by which the judgments of God will be administered. He has shewn that there is a light yet left, within the conscience of the most uninformed; and that every one will be judged according to the means

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

which he has possessed, of serving the Lord, and working righteousness; whether such means shall have been great or small. None therefore, to whom it has been possible to obtain information, can expect to escape punishment under the plea of ignorance. It is the common plea; but it is commonly false, when viewed in this, its just and proper light.

But now St. Paul turns to the more privileged: to those who have enjoyed greater blessings, and more advantages. Now he demands of them, in their turn; what shelter they can find, in all their knowledge and boast of information, if they be found deficient in their practice? And here, my brethren, comes a question which will touch *us* home. "Behold (says he), thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God; and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent; being instructed out of the law: and art confident, that thou thyself art a

guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes; who hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law." Such may be said to be the state of all now under the gospel dispensation; who live as we do, in the peaceable exercise of the religion which we profess; and with the advantage of unrestrained access to the holy and inestimable scriptures, which "are able to make us wise unto salvation."

To us then let the question which follows be applied, if we would profit by the word of God, and not be found to turn aside from it, when it ceases to suit well with our worldly ideas, or pursuits. "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" Such is the query which St. Paul proposes to the privileged Jews, privileged, as they were still fond of accounting themselves, in his own days, He seems to admit their knowledge; but he turns it upon themselves. He calls on them to shew what

were the fruits, which their superior advantages had been found to bear, in the conduct of their own lives.

The opportunity for ourselves also, is one which ought not to be lost, for much is the enquiry needed; and in this season especially ordained to be devoted to repentance; well does it deserve, nay, imperatively does it demand, our most serious attention.

We, like the Jews in that respect, have our schools, for the instruction of the ignorant at home. And well is it done, that such institutions have been founded among us, and are properly supported. It is one portion of godly care and conduct. But let us not forget, that one portion, is not all which is needed.

We have moreover missions, to impart the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ our Saviour whom he hath sent, to the heathen, who have hitherto sat in darkness. So far again is well; and it is an endeavour worthy of the servants of our

Blessed Redeemer. But neither does that approach at all to the complete fulfilment of a Christian's duty. Charity and brotherly love, and our Lord's injunction, all command us to have care for our brethren, whether near to us, or far off; and to benefit them to the utmost of our power. But still no professions of universal good will; no, nor even active exertions to confer benefits, though of the most essential description, upon others; can make good the whole of that duty, which we are bounden to perform. Still there will remain duties of inward discipline, of preparation of the heart and spirit, of devotion of the soul really and heartily to God. And these will be required, as the motives; by which our outward good deeds must be directed, if they would be accounted as done in the spirit of the true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Still must there be found in us a willingness, to submit ourselves to all godly discipline. There must be a readiness to

controul our evil affections, and passions; and to bring every thing into obedience, not only to the letter, but to the spirit of that holy gospel, by which we all, with more or less sincerity profess to walk.

What think we then of ourselves, my brethren, on this view of our case? In many instances, doubtless, well enough. But is the loose satisfaction with which self-conceit fills some, and utter carelessness, others; is that to be set forth, as any sort of answer to the question, which I would have particularly brought before us at this time? "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?"

Where is the instance of misdoing, on occasion of which numbers might not be brought forward, who censure it freely; while they draw no inferences to themselves, from the condemnation which they can so readily utter upon others?

The wisdom of the Gentiles had not preserved them from most egregious folly, in all

their notions concerning religion. Though they could teach others in some matters; though they could talk gravely, and sometimes powerfully, on the dignity of the divine nature; yet their whole worship was a disgrace to it; a disgrace to that which they professed to honour.

The Jew, with all his superior, infinitely superior privileges, and information, in the way of righteousness; in spite of all that pure knowledge, in which he had been instructed; and of that holy worship, to the outward observance of which he was ever labouring to bring the heathen, as proselytes; the Jew himself was little better. With all those advantages, he taught not himself; he forgot that purity which was in the spirit of the law; to follow and almost to worship, the forms of its exterior service, and the follies of his own traditions.

And Christians too on their part.—We, even we ourselves, my brethren, what is too generally found to be the manner, and

what the measure of our observance? So long as it can run in a routine, which the custom of society at this day has condescended to recognise; the worldly spirits who *call* themselves after the name of Christ, will vouchsafe to acknowledge the obligation. And therefore, as much as from any real principle of obeying God Almighty, and serving him; therefore it is, that too many (I do not say all) pay even their customary and visible devotions, even on the sabbath day.

Who they are that do so, that is from mere shew; and who they are who do it from better motives, others cannot always decide; and all should be backward to pretend to the power of making such decision. But all may judge themselves; and one obvious test by which to do so, lies at hand to all. All may easily know, if they will but truly search and examine within, how far their heart goes with their words; how far their own spirit accompanies their acts

of devotion. All may observe, for instance, how far their own respect for the Lord's sabbath carries them, beyond the service which is paid within the walls of his church. And if from thence they speedily turn to levities, and gaiety of amusement; or to feastings, as some do; or to matters of a merely common secular nature, wherein the Lord comes not near their thoughts; they may be but too certainly convinced, that their heart is far from him.

Or let us apply the same consideration to the services and exercises, which peculiarly belong to this season of fasting and humiliation. Let those who are seldom wanting in readiness to teach others, so far as blame will do it, and to censure others; shew that they have not forgotten, that there are duties to be learned; or at least, to be improved as to the practice of them, by themselves. Still is this necessary among us. Still have we, and ever shall we have, need for the exertion of all the means

which we can command, in order to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection.

And yet it were unjust not to allow, that in some respects, a degree of decency and decorum at least, if it cannot be called by a yet better name, has come to be observed among us. The excessive gaieties which some few years since did obtrude themselves on the view, and shock the minds, of devout and sober Christians, at this holy season, have for the most part ceased; at least during this portion of the year. If therefore there be occasionally an instance of such an outrage on christian feeling, it may be hoped that even it also will be removed from the appointed days of fasting and self-mortification.

All this is well, so far as it goes. But chiefly is it to be observed with gladness, because it gives hope of yet better things. Remember our Blessed Saviour's words, "These ought ye to have done, and not

to leave the other undone." Remember that we are called to perform not a blind, but a reasonable service.

And are we then authorised to rush blindly into every way which temptation may open before us? Are we to imagine that the whole blame of luxury, and dissipation, and waste of time and talents, and neglect of self-examination and repentance, rests only on them who put forward that which gives the invitation to transgression? Such is the deceit with which too many satisfy their blinded; aye, wilfully blinded consciences.

What, if a snare be spread before us. Have we no power to withhold our foot from stepping into it? Must it of necessity follow, because the temptation is placed in sight, that it must be one from which we cannot stand away? You yourselves know, my brethren, that such is not the case. If any one were to charge you with being unable to go, otherwise than as you were led by any individuals (let them be

who they might), you would with indignation, repel the charge. In what respect then is it better to be enslaved by the temptations of pleasure, or of fashion, than by their force; or by the fear of offending them, which interest might excite?

My brethren, we all know well enough what it is our duty to do; though few indeed are they who have not that mischievous ingenuity, which can always find excuse in the instance of themselves, for that which they so easily and freely condemn in that of others. Nor does it at all follow that such condemnation is otherwise than just. The offence committed may, and does too commonly, deserve it. But the evil is now, even as it was with the wise among the heathens, and with the learned among the Jews; that while they judged those who offended, they themselves did the same things.

Learn then to distrust ourselves. Learn to have courage enough, to make a stand

against an evil world; whatever be the wiles of its temptations, or the snares of its influence, and example. Remember that the Christian is called to wrestle against flesh and blood; and not to give way before them. If self-restraint and self-denial be required; and we ourselves can often perceive that they are so, when the conduct of others is in question; recollect that no law which we or our upholders can set up, is able to support us in the neglect of it. Nor can any licence of opinion, though it may be miscalled fashion and liberty, justify it. “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”* So speaks the Apostle, and we all know that his sentence is just and true.

* James iv. 17.

LECTURE IV.

ROMANS iii. 12.

THEY ARE ALL GONE OUT OF THE WAY: THEY ARE
TOGETHER BECOME ABOMINABLE; THERE IS NONE
THAT DOETH GOOD, NO NOT ONE.

THE subject of our last lecture led us to observe that which the Apostle says, of the equity of the dispensations of Almighty God. Privileges were shewn to have been given to the Jew above the Gentile, for an especial purpose. That purpose was, to preserve the knowledge of Him and of his truth, in that race, from whence, according to the flesh, the Redeemer was, in fulness of time, to proceed.

But though great advantages necessarily attended upon that privilege, yet it was shewn, that nothing like an unjust partiality could be charged upon the divine government. Each sort of persons was to be made accountable, for the use or abuse of that measure of information in the duties of man, which was by divine wisdom placed within its reach. The Gentile was accountable for the employment of the faculties, and of the reason which he possessed; and for the application of them to observe the visible effects of God's providence in the conduct of the universe. The Jew was accountable for much more; since he had for centuries enjoyed the benefit of God's word, and the prophetic revelations. These had been personally given, through many ages; and had been afterward left on record in his hands: and it was a record, the truth of which he did not, even in the worst days of that people, pretend to dispute.

Both therefore were pronounced to be

equally responsible; according to the measure of the talent entrusted to each. To whom much was given, of them much was required; and it was shewn that "there is no respect of persons with God."

The same was shewn to be applicable, in its principle, to ourselves, my brethren. We enjoy a more perfect knowledge of the word of God; a purer faith; a form of worship more free from error and superstition, than of the many nations which surround us. Let us recollect that still, as of old, there is no respect of persons with God. We are now the favoured occupiers of ten talents. If therefore our manner of occupying them be put to shame, by the greater diligence of them who hold but one; if our greater knowledge of the pure doctrines of christianity, do not lead to greater diligence and self-controul, in the practice of the holiness which is of faith; they, even our most benighted neighbours, shall rise up in the judgment against this generation, and shall

condemn it. Their conduct (mistaken as it may be) shall condemn us; if they *do* follow the true course so far as they have been taught to do; while we, though we have it plainly shewn to us, refuse to follow the straight and narrow way which leadeth unto everlasting life.

Having thus shown the perfect equity, with which the dealings of God are conducted toward all mankind, the Apostle goes on to the objection which the Jews would make. He asks (in the person of one of them), what were the advantages or benefits which they in particular enjoyed. He answers in his own person, that they had been great, even in that circumstance alone, of their possessing the recorded revelation of God's will. "Much (says he) every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." And to what, except the profession of that written word; to what else could rationally be ascribed the freedom from idolatry,

and all its gross errors and impurities; by which, since the return from Babylon the nation had ceased to be defiled; even for five hundred years and more.

"Thy word (says the Psalmist) is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths." To that light they had been able to return, and so to find the right way, whenever they were but really disposed, in their hearts so to do. How much more blessed than the most learned among the Greeks! The best and wisest of whom admitted, that they knew little or nothing of the Deity; and could not attain to such knowledge, without an express revelation sent to guide them.

Great was indeed the blessing bestowed, "in that to them, the Jews, were committed the oracles of God!" Great is the same blessing, now committed in like manner to ourselves, and to all of the reformed religion, in every church and every community. The grossness of idolatry is stopped

short: the darkness of superstition and utter ignorance, cannot close over that holy word. The light still shineth, and will shine unto the perfect day; though now, even as of old, there will be some perverse and blinded spirits, who will go astray; who love "darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

Cherish then, my brethren; let us cherish as our most valuable profession, that light, which the word of the Lord sheds forth upon us in those blessed scriptures. Let us "not be disappointed of our hope," our best and eternal hope; by any cunning craftiness on the one side, or by mistaken and mis-called liberality on the other. Let us stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ has made us free; and beware that we sell not our birthright, for any present prospect of ease, or gratification.

The third chapter of this epistle which we have now before us, opens in regular form of a dialogue. The Apostle begins in the person of the Jew, with the objections

which were urged by those of that nation against the christian liberty from the ritual law; and against the opening of the gate of salvation through Christ, to all the faithful among the Gentiles. He objects as a Jew to this, as if it were a thing inconsistent with the original promises of peculiar blessing to the Jews. The dialogue should be understood as going on by alternate verses, from the first to the ninth, where St. Paul takes the discourse up in his own person, at the words, "No in no wise, &c." And when he used that expression in the fifth verse, "I speak as a man;" he intended to make us fully understand this, namely, that he was using the mode of reasoning, which a man of his own nation would of course use.

The Jew is represented as arguing, that it is unjust to punish him for unbelief, if the falsehood of his aspersions upon the Lord Jesus, had tended to promote his honour, and advance the kingdom of God.

That such was the case is notorious. The dispersion of the followers of christianity, in consequence of the bitter opposition and persecution of the Jews, dispersed also together with them the knowledge of the faith which they professed. It spread the name of the Lord in a very short time, over the face of the whole Roman empire; which included at that time, far the greater part of the civilized world. It scattered the word, thinly indeed at first, as seed is sown on the ground; but by the favour and blessing of the Almighty, it soon sprang up and bare fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty. It increased in different proportions, according to the different conditions and circumstances of those, to whom it came. But every where it *did* increase; according to Gamaliel's sagacious prediction: "If this thing be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it."

The only difficulty in the understanding

of the opening of this chapter, when thus read as a dialogue, verse for verse, between the Jew and Christian, so far as to the second sentence of the ninth verse; is perhaps at the eighth. But this is not very difficult of comprehension, when we recollect what was the manner of St. Paul's writing; wherein he commonly left many expressions to be supplied, as the sense pointed out the necessity for them, in pursuance of his argument.

So there, the Jew is made to plead; "If the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie (that is through my conduct, which belied my profession of belief in him, and of obedience due to him); if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie, unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?"

Here ends the speech on the part of the Jew; for the next verse relates to a charge brought by the enemies of christianity against its profession; and (as they said, though

falsely), against its practice. But in the Apostle's short way, the beginning of that verse is left to be understood by the reader: as if he had written, "And why not add (of *us* Christians, he meant to say) as we are slanderously reported, &c. let us do evil that good may come."

He evidently has turned from the speech of the Jew, as these last words plainly shew. And he blames most strongly, and in terms of utter condemnation, that sentiment, which he tells us that their enemies were used to put into their mouths; falsely, to do so, as if they had been the usual speech of the Disciples.

I must however observe here, that the word "rather" in the beginning of that eighth verse, tends, as it seems to me, to perplex the sense. You will all of you perceive, on turning to it, that the word does not exist in the original; because it is printed in the italic character; which is always done purposely, to give intimation that

it is an insertion of the translators. Inserted (no doubt) it has been, under the idea of explanation; but in this instance, (as it seems to me), with an unfortunate effect; as tending to perplex, and not to clear, the passage.

The Jew has pleaded, that it is unjust to punish him, if his want of faith has caused the work of God to prosper. And such was the case. The Apostle replies, that he might as well argue, that the evil maxim which the unbelievers imputed to Christians, was commendable. "Let us do evil that good may come." But we must recollect that he stamps it as a slander, that any such thing should be reported of them; and adds, that its utter condemnation (including of course those who employed it), is just.

All then, Jews and Gentiles alike, are shewn to have brought themselves under the imputation of sin. The wisdom of the Greeks, or Gentiles, had not preserved them from gross error and general disobedience. Neither had the revelations, nor all the

national advantages so amply given to the Jews, saved them from sin; which though of a different description, equally rendered them liable to condemnation. So that the word of scripture was true in regard to both. "There is none that doeth good, no not one."*

Here then we come to a passage, of which (as it seems to me), a very improper use is made at this day by many; who doubtless mean well, but unfortunately do that which is really prejudicial to true religion. For those sweeping expressions of condemnation are taken by them, as involving the greater proportion of mankind; and as delivered absolutely; without any regard to the occasion on which, or the manner in which, St. Paul makes use of them.

"They are all gone out of the way; they are together become abominable, there is *none* that doeth good, no not one." Such are the words which follow, in continuation

* Pet. xiv. 3.

of those to which we have come, in the course of our enquiry into this epistle. Now in the first place; surely that which is said with a view to particular things, and in immediate and manifest reference to them, ought not to be construed as having respect to general matter, so much as to those things. And this must strike us at once, if we reflect on the former part of this chapter. St. Paul has been speaking of Jews and of Gentiles. He has been shewing that neither of them had any claim to the salvation of God; because both alike had abused the means of knowing and of following his truth, in such proportion as it had been imparted to each. And for that reason it was that he proceeded to this passage, which condemns the conduct of both the one and the other. For that reason he declares, that neither the one nor the other could advance any thing like a *claim* to the favour of the Almighty; nor assert any *right* to be admitted to his favour, and to the

inheritance of his eternal and inconceivable reward: He proves therefore that, of which it is a great object with him in this epistle to convince them all, that they have *all* gone out of the way, and lost all pretension to claim eternal reward, as of their own deserving. And from thence he proceeds to bring them onward to that hope, on which alone the erring sons of mortality can ever soberly, and with real safety, repose. He cites the book of Psalms, that (as Philip did to the Æthiopian eunuch) he may "begin at that scripture, and preach unto them Jesus."

Such is the use which sober and well-informed preachers will make of that doctrine, which he here brings forward and enforces; that doctrine of the general aye of the universal depravation of mankind. But such is not the use to which it is always applied at this day. Few can have failed to observe the exaggerated manner in which this matter has been represented, by those

who often mean well; but while they keep watch over some of their passions, who seem not to be aware that they allow themselves to be deluded in a very mischievous manner, by other impulses and feelings of their mind. They are fond of representing human nature as one mass of unmixed corruption! And in confirmation of that doctrine, we hear those words cited which have introduced my discourse this day. But we hear them brought forward (as has too often been the case in regard to other texts of scripture), without any regard to the particular matter to which St. Paul intended them to be applied. To that however our attention must be turned, unless we would incur the fearful charge of "wresting and perverting his expressions." For if they be so wrested, as to produce presumption on the one hand, or despair on the other, it must needs tend toward their own destruction who shall be guilty of such perversion.

But it may perhaps be asked, "How can

the doctrine of universal corruption, and of the most utter sinfulness, laid upon all mankind, puff up any one with vain conceits?" It may be asked, "Must not every one be conscious of composing in part such mass of abominable wickedness?" When stated thus plainly, it becomes at once evident, that sound reason will, nay, that it must lead to such conclusion, if it ever do admit that, which is thus asserted universally of *all* mankind, and yet so precisely. I say universally, not generally; for a general assertion will admit cases of exception; but an assertion so universal and yet so precise as "none, no not one," can admit no exception.

And yet do we not plainly see, that those who maintain such doctrine, do contrive to forget how it *must* involve themselves? Or else, in spite of all sense and meaning of the most positive words (according to their interpretation of them), that they do contrive some way for themselves to escape?

It cannot possibly be, that they who con-

sider Scripture as having denounced the penalties of divine vengeance for unmixed sinfulness; (and such are invariably declared to be its reward); it cannot be, that they should go on under the feeling that they have incurred that sentence, together with all their fellow mortals; and yet go on, as those who make such avowals evidently do, in peace and hope. Nor do they so. But there is a delusion with which they impose on their own minds; and then, fancying themselves to be safe, they imagine that they may scatter the avenging fire of divine wrath on all around them.

Now what does holy Scripture invariably teach concerning the natural man?—That is to say, What does it teach concerning man in his state of nature; unredeemed, and unsanctified, by God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost? No doubt it teaches that the imaginations of his heart are now, as they were at the time of the universal deluge, only evil continually.

But to what purpose has our Saviour died?
Or to what, has divine grace been sent forth by the Holy Spirit, if that depravation of our nature is not to be amended by the latter, and our absolute curse and condemnation reversed by the former; so as to make our absolute condemnation remediable; so that such as are really faithful, and therefore penitent, may, by that grace, and through that atonement, escape from such utter condemnation?

The imaginations of man's heart are then influenced, though not constrained, from above; to take a better course than that which nature would have taught. Faith teaches the true Christian to endeavour to follow such guidance; and the help of God, for Jesus Christ's sake strengthens such endeavours, and counts them to us graciously for real righteousness. Though real righteousness if the term be used in strictness, would be nothing short of perfect obedience. And thus it is, as the Apostle

says, that “by grace ye are saved, through (or by the fruits of) faith; and that not of themselves; it is the gift of God; not of works (not deservedly, nor to be claimed on account of them), lest any man should boast.”

But in this sweeping charge, not of general depravity, which is but too true, but of universal and unvarying wickedness unmixed with any goodness, which is thus with an unsparing hand cast upon *all* alike, as if it were to be drawn by fair and legitimate construction from the words of the Apostle; in spite of this, I say, there is evidently a way left for escape. It is left for their own benefit, by those who lay this imputation on all. It is to operate for their own advantage as they persuade themselves, through a delusion which partial reading has confirmed, after enthusiasm had given birth to it.

For can it possibly be imagined that any persons can go on, really feeling that they

are themselves void of all sort or description of that "holiness, without which they own that no man can see the Lord,"* (as St. Paul says) unless they have some such device, under which to find an imaginary shelter for themselves? The thing is impossible.

There have indeed (no doubt), been some who have holden such tenets in the fervor of a distempered mind. Thus they have fallen into despair, and have been sometimes tempted thereby to do violence to themselves; and to rush, in the presumptuous and foul crime of self-murderers, uncalled, into the presence of their judge. But such fanaticism, and such enormity, which is its natural fruit, sufficiently condemn themselves.

That is not however the case with many; though many will thus misquote St. Paul's expression, of which we have here spoken. They have builded a wall (as it were), to shelter themselves from all the horrors which

* Heb. xii. 11.

they raise; but they have builded (as says the prophet Ezekiel)* with “untempered mortar.” On what can they rest? Or why should they suppose that they should be exempted from the expression, there is none that doeth good, no not one; if it be made one of universal application without regard to the matter with which it is connected? They rely on some delusion, that they are chosen and elected of God, fore-ordained to salvation; without regard to their lives, or to their works. But remember, my brethren, that election is always to a covenant; that it may admit to privileges, or favours, or advantages; but that it never alters the condition of any man, from a state of trial, to one of security.

The children of Israel were elected to be the chosen people; “But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” The city of

* xiii, 10.

Jerusalem was elected, and fore-ordained to be the holy place, where God would put his name. Yet twice has it been overthrown for its crimes; and the name of an impostor and false prophet now reigns there triumphant. The Apostle Judas was elected, to be our Blessed Lord's companion upon earth; and he was elected also after death to be one of the twelve, who should sit on twelve thrones "judging the twelve tribes of Israel." From all that privilege he however by transgression fell, when he failed under his probation; he fell to the effect that he might go to that place of perdition, which his crime had made his own.

The Apostle Paul's words teach nothing contradictory to this. With regard to the perfect fulfilment of that righteousness which conscience taught the Gentiles, he declared that *all* had gone astray, and that there was not one that did righteousness. With regard to the Jews, who had enjoyed a clearer light, he nevertheless declared the same.

And the result to which he brought them was this, that none could claim to be saved for their works, but purely for the grace of God through Christ Jesus. He taught that no professions, and no belief alone, without the works of faith, would save us; but that the wrath of God is revealed in the gospel, against "all unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" that is to say, who profess to believe, or do believe, but do not the righteousness which the Gospel demands.

But though this be not said of Christians, that there is none that doeth good; though we learn that goodness may be imputed to the faithful (through the grace of our Blessed Lord, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost); yet what multitudes are there who call themselves Christians, and yet deserve no better report or character, than this which the Apostle gives to unbelieving Jews, or heathens! Let us not argue (my brethren), from the name to the thing;

which is an easy, and a flattering way, but full of most dangerous deceit; but let us argue, if we would know the truth, from our practice, to the name which ought in strict justice to be affixed to it.

It is easy to call ourselves Christians; and if a name would save us, there is no doubt that none would be lost. But our Lord has left us a very distinct warning, against any such wretched self-delusion. He has said, “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Not every one that saith unto me Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

Names of party and of reproach, my brethren, do nothing but harden the professed disciples of the same heavenly Master, the one against the other. Let our enquiry be into ourselves; and if we would avoid the imputation of unfaithfulness to the service which we have undertaken, let us not fear

to search, and throughly to examine ourselves.

What man lives, who can presume to say that the hour of the Lord's heavy judgments is not presently coming; aye, in part actually come upon the earth? Who can have paid any attention to the wonderful events, which have, within the memories of very many of us, taken place; without noticing the characters predicted, as indicating times which call upon us all to prepare for the final judgments of the Almighty?

I venture not to foretel (my brethren) the things which are about to come. Nor can I consider them as acting judiciously, who do venture upon any such measure, in confidence of that which they conceive to be pointed out, by the dark suggestions of unaccomplished prophecy. Those things are thus far hinted (as it seems to me) in dark figures; in order that when the event shall have unfolded them, a clear testimony may be afforded to the wisdom and provi-

dence of God. These things are so far told "before they come to pass, that when they are come to pass we may believe"—But it is vain and presumptuous, for man to seek "to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

Yet general signs have been named, as indications from which we are to conclude that the end is drawing near. But be it remembered, that we are no where told how near at hand it may be. Near perhaps it may be, in comparison with the whole of time; and yet it may be to any individual distant, so far as regards his own time; or it may be coming even suddenly, at an instant. There is only one proper conclusion to be drawn. And may the Lord grant us all grace to make, and to improve it! "Be ye therefore ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."

Unquestionable it is that risings of people,

and tumults, and wars; and fearful commotions, beyond all former recollection, have in our times fallen on the world. And what says our Lord of them? "These are the beginnings of sorrows."

What manner of persons then ought we to be, in all holiness and godliness of living; if we would hope to be enabled to endure that, which may, not at all improbably, be appointed for our own days? Shall we go on, because the tide of mankind still holds that course; in pursuing the empty follies and vanities, which swallow up the days and years of so many? Think not that professions and intentions will suffice. If we would avoid being hurried down the stream to the pit of destruction, we must struggle upward; and not be satisfied with that which demands no exertion, nor any self-control.

Remember then, that though many there may be in these days, who deem themselves sufficiently secure against the charge

of having become abominable, which they think a strong expression; yet that the Apostle's language does seem manifestly to include many more than absolute profligates. He seems to include under that strong expression, those who have "gone out of the way," to follow the inventions of man; and those also who "do not good." The absence of positive and active well-doing, must therefore be accounted for positive and actual sin. It was so in the Romans. It was so in the Jews. And even so, in like manner must it be, with those who "say and do not;" though they may seek never so much, to cover themselves under the shadow of the Christian name.

LECTURE V.

ROMANS iv. 13.

FOR THE PROMISE THAT HE SHOULD BE THE HEIR OF
THE WORLD (WAS), NOT TO ABRAHAM OR TO HIS
SEED THROUGH THE LAW, BUT THROUGH THE
RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH.

MY last lecture took into consideration the subject of the general (not the universal and unmixed), depravity of man. It pointed out, that the Apostle intended to enforce the necessity of redemption for all, because all had sinned against that degree of light which each possessed. And it shewed that his sweeping expressions of the abominable sinfulness of all, were indeed intended for Jews, and Greeks alike; but are not to be thus fully extended to them who are Christians and disciples indeed.

The same argument is continued to the end of that third chapter. And it is strongly enforced, that no man living had, nor now has, any *claim* to the favour of God; because all have sinned, and come short of the conditions of the covenant on their part. He points out therefore the free gift and bounty of the Almighty, in having of his grace alone, without any sort of claim or right on the part of man, sent forth his salvation through Jesus Christ, to them who work the righteousness of faith. "Therefore (says he) we conclude that a man is justified by faith (is put into a condition wherein he may be capable of salvation by faith), without the deeds of the law;"* that is, without any claim of merit, for having perfectly obeyed the law; which no man has done.

The gift of salvation is free; not because any man is saved arbitrarily in unrepented

* Rom. iii. 28.

sin; but because it is of “grace, and not of debt;” because it is given through the merits and atonement of our Saviour to man; and is not due to any man. It is given to them who mortify the flesh and do the works of the spirit through faith, trusting in our Blessed Redeemer’s merits and mercies; and not to them who work trusting in their own merits, and in the value of their own performance.

This course of argument leads the Apostle forward, to consider the principle, upon which obedience to the commands of God, even the most apparently arbitrary among them, obtained commendation and reward. For great was the value which the Jews in all times attributed, especially to the observance of such arbitrary institutions as were of divine appointment. The principle was good; but they corrupted it to evil. It was good, because compliance with that of which the utility was not obvious, must have been paid through faith in Him who required

such compliance. But they abused it by losing sight of the reason why such obedience was counted for righteousness before God; and forgetting that godly living rested on precisely the same foundation, and is equally a work of faith. For it is to be paid, not because we judge it to be proper, wholesome, kind, or good, which would depend on the judgment of man; but solely because we know that God commands man to practise it; and because we believe that He will reward those who endeavour, and punish those who refuse, so to do.

The Jews farther abused the principle of obedience to positive institutions, such as were the greater part of those in their ceremonial law; by losing sight, in process of time altogether of God's moral law; of the righteousness which ought to proceed from faith; and by resting on the act alone. And so they went on to the imputation of merit to the observance of their own traditions, while they forgot the weightier mat-

ters of the law, justice, mercy, and peace. Be it not forgotten my brethren, that in this course the worship of the Romish church even down to our own days has too much followed their example. For therein it is taught that masses and forms of words repeated, and that penances, and ceremonies, have a merit in themselves; and that they do, by the very act of their performance, tend to give a title to eternal salvation.

So universal has been the tendency of human pride, towards the claim of satisfactory merit as existing in itself; and that in all ages, and among all people. For it was much the same also among the heathen, in respect of their rites, and gifts; their processions, and sacrifices.

Such is the fruit of superstition, which has shewn itself in all ages and all religions; superstition, which always arises from a deficiency of true christian faith. Here therefore the Apostle opens this fourth chapter, with shewing that no rites or ceremonies, nor

any acts of service, had produced the justification of Abraham. That is to say, they had not altered his condition by nature, nor given him any right, to stand as one who could claim salvation before God on account of them.

The Jews stood, as they imagined, upon acts of outward service, and ceremonious observances. The Apostle points out to them, that Abraham had not been chosen of God on account of his performances of these; but that he had been so chosen long before they were ordained, for the uprightness of his practices; which arose from implicit belief in, and obedience to, the Lord.

He was chosen moreover by the free grace and favour of God; who was not, and could not be, bounden to make any such choice, nor to give him any such pre-eminence; whatever his righteous conduct or obedience might have been. Yet we must never forget, that though he did choose and prefer him by favour of his own

free grace, yet such grace was not bestowed on him until he had proved himself, by his faith working righteousness, to be (so far as man can be) deserving of it. It was not a debt paid, but a favour bestowed; yet bestowed on one who had diligently studied to shew himself not unworthy of it.

The words of the epistle,* “To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt,” must not be strained beyond the meaning, which the whole course of the Apostle’s reasoning in this place plainly conveys. They signify that when a man works so as to have earned, and become entitled to his hire; it is that to which he has a right: it is then, in such case, not given to him as a favour, but as payment of a just debt. He does not mean to undervalue the works of godliness, which true faith will always move the sincere Christian to shew forth; but to admonish us, that those

works, at the very best are so imperfect, that they cannot on the ground of right claim any reward.

And in the same way it is said in the next verse that God “justifieth the ungodly;” which must be understood not absolutely, but with reference to the rest of the argument, in the course of which it occurs. It is not, that God imputes righteousness to any persons, while they are persisting in courses of iniquity; but that he does so, while yet, in spite of all the good which their faith excites them to do, their work is so tainted by human depravity, as to be still *in his sight* short of true and perfect righteousness.

Or it may be taken (and some have so understood it), as referring to *Abraham's* former habits; when he lived with his father Terah, and probably served his Gods. So Joshua tells the Israelites. “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood, in old time;

even Terah the father of Abraham, and they served other gods.”* That sin of having served other gods was not imputed to him, when he had obeyed the Lord, and followed his especial calling to come out from that land, into one which he promised that he would give to him. This is plainly the real meaning. It certainly does not signify that Abraham was taken into favour while in a state of ungodly living; but when he had proved his faith, by active devotion of himself to the service of God then that faith, though his former account were unrighteousness in the sight of God, that active faith, was counted to him for righteousness.

It is a matter of no small importance that we should bear in mind the form of expression, which the Apostle uses in all the course of this argument. He is extremely careful, never to give any idea to his converts, that

*Josh. xxiv. 2.

their acts had any thing in them intrinsically, which could justify them in setting up a claim as of right, to the favour and blessing of God. The expression always is, not that their faith, even in the highest perfection to which they could carry it, was really and actually such as it ought to be; or that it produced such a life as could lay *claim* to reward at his hand. But he always says, that it was "counted to them for righteousness;" it was allowed to stand on their account, as if it had been perfect obedience and godliness.

The very expression that it was "counted to them," proves that he intended to imply, that it was not really and essentially that, for which it was so accounted. And to the same purpose it is that he introduces the words of David, from the thirty-second psalm, "Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven (not who has none to be forgiven, for there is no soul that liveth and sinneth not). Blessed is the

man unto whom the Lord will not impute sin." The imputation could not be made by a righteous Judge, had there not existed actual sin in every case. And therefore since criminality always is, and always will be found in man; so much as to take away all claim of right to the reward of righteousness (for it must be faultless, in order to be entitled of right to the reward): therefore the imputation of righteousness, the counting of righteousness to any one, must be the fruit of grace; that is to say, of divine favour, and of that alone.

Are we then, my brethren, to suppose that any claim can possibly belong to us, any more than it did to Abraham and to his seed of old? Can we, because we have been called into the fold of Christ here on earth, flatter ourselves that we have righteousness on that account, for which we may claim admission into his kingdom of heaven? Far from it. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," is the

precept which all must carry with them, if they would hope that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

But it has been set up by some in their own favour, that such imputation of righteousness is altogether an arbitrary thing; and they who have set up the idea, have too commonly endeavoured to make their own claim upon it. Now whatever the Apostle says on the subject, he exemplifies it in Abraham. But what is there in this place where St. Paul speaks so much on the subject, which can with any fairness or reason be made to bear such signification? The covenant, so far as regarded the nation of the Jews, might in some sense be said to have been given arbitrarily; because it was given before they existed as a nation. But still it was for their forefather's faith; and in that respect, as to its original grant, and with reference to him, it was not arbitrary. The covering of Abraham's infirmity, and the grant to him of such a gracious promise

for his posterity, was not arbitrary. It was not given through the law; not through any forms or ceremonies; nor through any choice made arbitrarily of him without respect to his obedience, which is the foundation of all righteousness. But it was given through the righteousness of faith: because he believed fully in God who had promised, and therefore with boldness executed that which he was called to do.

Abraham then believed in God, and proved his belief; and that was counted to him for righteousness. And this happened thirteen years before he had received the covenant of circumcision; before he had been placed as the first member of the visible church of God.

To us this furnishes matter for consideration, not other than appropriate to the season, to which the mercy of the Lord has granted us again to come. For if the righteousness of faith was allowed by divine grace, to work so great things for Abraham;

the *righteousness* which is by faith, I say, and not mere belief on the one hand, nor any privileges, or promises, or forms of service on the other; to what does it teach us Christians to look as that to which our merciful God will impute merit for our Saviour's sake? Is it not to that righteousness which still ought to be, though in very many instances I fear that we cannot say that it now is, by faith? Perfected as the object of our faith now is; and infinitely cleared and improved as are its prospects, even to eternal, instead of temporal things; so much the more is that righteousness which ought in all cases to be its fruit, to be shewn forth by us.

The present is the season (if there be one above all others), peculiarly appropriate to the examination of our own courses and habits, in regard to this matter. We cannot more profitably employ the time which remains to us on this occasion, than in turning our serious attention toward it,

There is, as we all know, a promise made to us who are followers of the faith which is in Jesus Christ; a promise that we shall be inheritors, not of the world that now is, but of that which is to come. But as the ancient promise was made to Abraham, not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith; so is it now made to ourselves. And never let us forget, that it is to such righteousness, to such godly living, as shall proceed from faith in all the promises, and all the threatenings, and all the revelations of God, and not in some one or two selected parts of them, that such promise is made.

How then have we, even we ourselves, my brethren, and all who dwell around us to whom the influence of our word or of our example may extend—how have we shewn forth that righteousness? Have we given proof, that we are not only able, but willing to fight the good fight of faith? And do we bear in mind that such an expression, familiar as is its sound in our ears, implies

a conduct widely different from that of very many, far too many, among those who call themselves Christians? Where is the righteousness of faith in them, who would rest upon a name, a baptism, or a profession, without recollecting to what that name has pledged them; for what purpose the Holy Ghost in baptism offered (if they would accept them) his sanctifying influences; or what is the self-controul, and self-denial, and mortification of the flesh, which they either personally, or by sureties, then professed their determination to practise? Or what is the faith, on the other side, which seeks to be indicated by inward impressions alone, and imagined influences of the divine spirit? What is it worth, if these are not to produce the righteousness which always comes of faith, wherever that virtue really exists, and is not confounded with mere empty belief?

Well may the question which the Apostle here puts concerning Abraham, be pro-

posed also concerning all, and to all, who deceive themselves under any delusion of either sort; and so contrive to evade the shewing forth of those lively fruits, which are the only true proofs of faith; because they prove that the righteousness of faith is in us. Well, I say, may it be proposed now concerning us, though in a different way from that in which St. Paul here brings it forward.

“ What shall we say then (asks he), that Abraham, our father according to the flesh, hath found?” What shall we say on our part, that we the children of God, by adoption and grace through our Lord Jesus Christ, have found? Have we found a law which will encourage us in wickedness?

Far from it. Have we found a salvation to which we have been absolutely elected, and which cannot be lost by our evil doing?

Nothing at all like it. Have we received any security for going on in useless, unprofitable, and therefore ungodly ways; and

imagining that we shall be saved by the blood of our Blessed Redeemer's sacrifice, without seriously keeping before us (the) awful question, "What must we do to be saved?" All such ideas are mere deceitfulness and ruin.

Too many perhaps may be found, who imagine that in the words here before us, the Apostle merely intended to undervalue the Jewish, that is the Mosaic, in comparison with the Christian law. And in St. Paul's epistles that distinction which the article makes, is often of the highest utility, but chiefly for those who can read them in the original language. For when he speaks, not of law in general, but of the law; it generally does designate the peculiar law of the Jews, with all its rites and ceremonies.

But we must recollect, that though this be a good and a useful rule, to be carried with us, yet it is not one of universal application in regard to our version. The very text with which I introduced this present

discourse proves it. We read, "The promise that he should be the heir of the world (was) not to Abraham or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." But in the original it is,* was not to Abraham or to his seed, through law. It is not said through the law, which might to some seem to mark the ritual law of the Jews; though we must remember that it existed not in Abraham's day. But it is said not to be through law; not on account of Abraham's having really and exactly fulfilled any law, which the Almighty had given.

It is as if he had written, It was not to Abraham or his seed, through the righteousness which they had shewn, in never failing to obey the commandments of God; for they had all failed. But it was through the righteousness which was imputed to him, on account of his acts of faith.

The object of the argument is to prove
* οὐδεὶς δικαιούσθη ἐπαγγέλτως, &c.

that, which is said also in express terms; that the acceptation of Abraham and of his seed, was not "of debt." It was not owing to them, as to those who had actually deserved it at God's hand. But it was of grace. It was the fruit of God's favour, shewn to Abraham and to his seed after him, on account of his inflexible faith; that faith which induced him, under all trials and temptations, to do that which God commanded, and to put his trust in him, for a blessing on such deeds.

Here then is the point to which our imitation, if we would deserve the name of Christians, ought to be, nay, must be directed. We must learn to "walk by faith, and not by sight." We must learn to have respect to a state of things yet *to be* revealed; and not to any which we have seen, or can expect to see, so long as we remain in this our place of probation. We must learn to "set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth."

And it is the latter part of this injunction which, unhappily for man, meets with the least attention from him. To look to reward hereafter, in the mere sense of simply expecting to inherit it, is indeed a very easy matter to a careless mind. But thus it is that many think of it, and never carry their considerations beyond that point.

Behold the young and the old alike; for the fault is not confined to any age, nor to either sex, among us. Behold them numbered ostensibly among the followers of our Blessed Redeemer; and of course (though they may think little or nothing upon the subject); yet of course acknowledging that they are debtors to his law, and covenant of holiness. They seem to imagine (if we may judge from the secure and careless habit of their lives), that they are heirs of the world by promise. They seem to suppose that their faith, such as it is, will save them; and without ever looking into the title which they thus set up, live in

that promise, which idleness and thoughtless habits encourage; that “to-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant.”

But where is any promise given by God, to such habits, and such manner of living? He has indeed, it is true, given a promise even to them. But it is not one on which they will much delight to dwell. He calls them, not to sit down thus contented and at ease, imagining that all is safe for them. But he commands all without exception, to “work out their own salvation.” “With fear and trembling” are we commanded to work it out; not in peace, and indolence, and carelessness.

The promise which is given to us who call ourselves Christians, is, as St. Paul here declares, through the *righteousness* of faith. And who that gives any consideration to the matter, can be mistaken in such an expression as this?

Too well do we know, how fatally many have perverted the promises and assurances

which are made, in reference to faith. Too well do we know how many will profess that they have that virtue, while they know not (and how should they know, for they have never taken pains to learn)?—they know not what it is; and rest upon a mere profession and an empty name.

But the righteousness of faith must needs be beyond all such misconstruction. It is not a thing to be taken for granted in all, merely because they bear a christian name. It must be proved, by far other than a worldly life, if it would lay claim to those rewards, which are far above all that this wretched world can give.

Think then ye careless ones, while yet the hour of thought and reflection in this mortal state is with you. Which of us can dare to say how long that period shall be, or how suddenly it shall be brought to an end? Beware of letting the reprobate mind grow up in you, and become confirmed, as it was in the heathen of old. It is a mind

which cannot endure) to prove, and to examine things for itself, by the rule of the word of life; and therefore follows heedlessly in the track of others. However senseless, however stupid be their carelessness; it follows them even to "the blackness of darkness for ever."

The day which is yet before us is a day of probation; and never let us forget that it has an end; how near to any, or to all of us, we know not. The promise which is given to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, is that we shall be heirs; yet not heirs of this world, but of that which is to come. But still, recollect, my brethren, that inheritance is not actual possession. The Jews were heirs of promises, but they were disinherited in the instances of thousands; of many thousands, through all periods of their history. Because they failed to shew the obedience of children; God therefore withdrew from them the kindness, and protection, and forgiveness, of a Parent.

So then may it be (but may the Lord forbid that it should be) even with us! Let us never forget that "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore hasten to walk honestly, as in the day." "While ye have the light, walk as children of the light. And put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, that ye should fulfil the lusts thereof."

that which was given to them, after all their sins, and yet they were abundantly rewarded with much grace; and that they should therefore be called the children of God, and heirs of salvation, by reason of their great goodness.

LECTURE VI.

ROMANS V. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

ROMANS V. 10.

FOR SIN SINCE THE FEDOM OF SIN HATH BY SIN REIGNED UNTO DEATH, EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE BY GRACE REIGN, THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS, UNTO ETERNAL LIFE, BY JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

IN the chapter which we last considered, the privileges of Abraham's seed according to the flesh, were noticed by St. Paul. They were shewn to depend not on their birth, but on their faith; and through that alone was it declared, that the privileges of their descent from him could be enjoyed by them individually.

"But here again he turns to the Romans especially, who were not his seed according to the flesh; to them who should walk

in the faith of their spiritual father Abraham (the father of the faithful, as he is called), in that faith which he had being yet uncircumcised." And great as were the advantages offered to the national seed, those which were to be given to his spiritual seed were yet greater.

Of that seed (my brethren), if it be not through our own fault, we ourselves and all Christians, shall be accounted for a portion, We are among the branches of the wild olive tree, which are "grafted in, to partake of the root and fatness" of the plant, which God originally planted in his own favour, and protection. Yet are we not so grafted in, but that we may be cut off. Nor are the especial advantages granted to the spiritual seed of Abraham such, as must of necessity bring us all into the rest of the heavenly Jerusalem; any more than the temporal advantages promised to the Jews in the wilderness, were effectual to bring all that people into the promised land.

The carcases of those who disobeyed, and with whom therefore "God was not well pleased," fell in the wilderness. And the souls of them who know the law of the covenant of salvation given through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, but keep it not, will infallibly be cast out from heaven; how much soever they may have been called of God, to enter by such means as he has appointed into his rest. For they will not have obeyed that calling, as it was given to them; and without holiness, which is the object and essence of his calling, no man shall see the Lord. If found without that garment of righteousness, they shall be cast out "into outward darkness, where shall be wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

The Apostle here begins, with declaring that the peace of the converts with their God, depended on the Lord Jesus Christ; not (as the Jews imagined that theirs still did), on the works of the old law, whether of the Patriarchal, or the Mosaic law. It

depended on the grace or favour “of God, who justifieth (or putteth into the situation of persons capable of being accepted), the imperfect, who are all in his sight ungodly;” and that he does through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the first privilege of Christians. And infinitely greater is it, than any which belongs to the covenant of works; a covenant, the fulfilments of which required constant works of holiness, without any sort of failure.

It is their privilege also, that the very things which they are made to suffer, do to the faithful, supply matter for joy and exultation. “Not only (adds he), but we glory in tribulation.”*

But what sort of glorying was that, to which he thus encouraged them? Not a boasting of the things which they suffered. Not any puffing up of their conceit of their

* Rom. v. 3.

own sanctity, because they had courage and steadfastness so to endure.

Nor was their motive any pride of spirit which made them court persecution. Nor did they go out of their way, to oppose and revile the harmless customs, and indifferent practices, wherein others disagreed from them; merely because they did not conform to some system which they had been pleased to set up. The Apostles never courted tribulation, nor gloried in it after that manner; on the contrary, when duty did not require them to endure, they avoided it; and never provoked ill usage, in any vain conceit of their own strength. And so our great Master and Lord had commanded them, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another."

But they were specially inspired. Their understandings were opened by the Holy Ghost, to enable them to distinguish truly between the cases which occurred. And of that power of discrimination they availed

themselves; sometimes retiring from the tumult and danger, and sometimes facing it, and enduring all which could be inflicted. Their object was, that in all things the name of God might be praised; and not their own name nor their own courage. Their aim was, "That the word of the Lord might have free course and be glorified."*

"And such is, I trust even at present, the real aim and object of many sincere and devout Christians. But let it be remembered, that there may be a zeal which is not according to knowledge. There may be also a degree of self-deception operating in the mind, and that sometimes, when those on whom it acts, and acts powerfully too, are not conscious of it. And therefore the ambition of undergoing tribulations, is no proof in itself, of resemblance between those who feel it and the Holy Apostles of old.

*2 Thes. iii. 1.

If the affectation of singularity prompt any Christians to differ from their neighbours, there can be nothing praiseworthy in *that*. If the desire of distinction prompt them to incur the ill will of those, over whom they would in any way exalt themselves as being especially holy, they have their reward. And if a mistaken zeal do really persuade them, that, as a matter of conscience, they are called of God, to follow any particular fancies or inward suggestions, which are unsupported by the fair construction of the recorded word of God; let them never allow themselves to imagine that evil report or any ill will incurred in such a manner, can be counted to them for righteousness.

Remember the Apostle's question, "What glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently?" Patience in all cases is the duty of a Christian; and he sins who fails to exhibit it. But there is no ground for praise when it has been

rendered necessary, by the consequences of our own ill-founded pretensions; whether they have sprung from fancy, deluded by enthusiasm, or from self-conceit.

They who suffered for Christ's sake in the Apostles' days, glorified in tribulations. But it was not with a vain glory; it was not as priding themselves on their own strength. The expression only signifies, that they felt a pleasure even under their sufferings. It was a pleasure grounded in faith and hope; and it is by St. Paul here mentioned, not by way of boasting in his own steadfastness; but for the sake of encouragement, to those who were likely to be exposed to the same endurance. Therefore he reminds them, that their patience and endurance worked their approval as true and faithful disciples; and to that approval of them in their christian profession, they well knew that the mercy of God would not fail, in his good time, to give reward.

The expression however, as we have it

in our version, is not so strong nor so accurate as it ought to be. We read thus, “Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope; &c.”* Now experience is not the true meaning of the original word.† It signifies a test, or here the having endured a test. That tribulation produceth patience (or rather, makes it manifest), in the godly disposed, is well known to all; however little too many may have taken care, to keep their own patience ready at hand, when it may have been so required. But, that “patience worketh experience,” is a passage not very easy to be comprehended: for it is not so much patience which does it, as the affliction itself. It worketh both patience, in the godly, and experience. But (as I before observed), “experience” is a word which does not convey exactly, the sense of the original expression.

* 3, 4 v. &c.

† δοκίμη

The word used in the Greek, is one which in its own direct signification means the assay (as it is called), or the putting of the precious metals (gold and silver) to the test, in order to try their purity. Now look upon the word "experience" in this sense, which any one who is well acquainted with the original language of the epistles, must know to be the true sense. There you have at once a plain, and a forcible idea, conveyed by the Apostle's words. Patience worketh proof; that sort of proof which is obtained by trying gold in the furnace: that is to say, proof of its genuine character and purity. And proof (such proof as makes the purity of our principles to be apparent, in the patience with which we undergo trials for the Lord's sake), worketh hope. It worketh the hope of that reward through the mercies of God, which is laid up for them to whom our Blessed Saviour also has thus promised it; "He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved."

Let us however, my brethren, not rest satisfied with searching out thus the real import of any passage in the Holy Scriptures. But let us be careful to apply it also to our own improvement. Such patience is required of us all; and it must be shewn in other ways, than those of which the words commonly suggest the idea.

We usually think of suffering only, and of unshrinking steadfastness under afflictions, and of even temper under provocations, when we use the word. And doubtless it is applicable, most strictly applicable, to them.

But there is another matter, in which it is no less required, though far less commonly shewn. And that is in submitting to the restraints, which holiness and godliness of living demand; and to the privations, which they will frequently require at our hands. Patience to submit our unruly passions and appetites and inclinations to such

restraints, worketh proof,* not less than suffering under persecution.

But it is in different times, and under different circumstances, that we are called to give those proofs of our true profession of christianity, whether by patience under torments, and death; or by patience under temptation from our own passions; or by patience under taunts, and ridicule, and that evil name, which is given by an evil world to its opposers.

It is easy enough to imagine situations of danger, in the quiet of our own homes; and then and there, to determine how resolutely we would endure, and how gloriously our patience should in such cases give evidence to our faith. But well we know, that no such circumstances have befallen us. Well we know, that the fiery trial, under which the patience of the primitive Christians gave evidence to their fortitude through faith, may never occur. We may never be put to such proof.

* δοκιμήν.

It is against that which constantly occurs, that we have need to keep ourselves armed and ready. It is against that, which threatens presently to come upon us, and not merely in the creations of our own imagination, that we have need to stand upon our guard. Whatever may be the case hereafter (which no mortal can presume to say), yet at the present time, the proof which our patience must give, is under the tribulation of evil society from without, and of evil dispositions within.

How then does our patience endure, when called to deny the world, and refuse its indulgencies, at this season for instance; when called thus to deny ourselves, and refuse them for conscience sake? How does it prove, that it can set at nought the sneers and scoffs of an ungodly and luxurious society; when the ancient custom of the church of Christ demands this? And it has so done throughout this season of penitence, and preparation of the heart.

Have you had such godly patience (my brethren) as to endure even that short measure of self-denial, for the Lord's sake?— Have you proved, that you had patience to see others following their dissipations and festivities; their courses of heedless gaiety and splendid luxury; while you were studying to acquire the habit, of "keeping under the body and bringing it into subjection?" If so it have been with you, blessed has been the patience, which has thus given real and practical evidence of your christian faith. If not; remember, I beseech you, that there is but one hope which maketh not ashamed: but one, of which we shall not be ashamed in the great and terrible day of the Lord. And that is the hope in Christ, which they are authorised, through his mercy, to entertain, who rest not on name nor professions nor imaginary privileges; as the Jewish converts were too much disposed to do. But they are authorised to hold it who can prove they have put on

the spirit of Christ, and conformed themselves to his pattern. They are authorised to hold it, who have crucified, and do yet crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof.

The remainder of the Apostle's discourse here turns upon the infinite love of Christ, in having laid down his life for us. He urges us to the consideration of that act of unspeakable kindness;* an act such as scarcely any man could be brought to do for his best and kindest friend; but which he, in his infinite mercy, did for us, while we were in a state of wrath, and of hostility to him and to his holiness—"While we were yet enemies Christ died for us."

If then such has been his love shewn toward us; what love, what return of thankfulness and obedience, are we not bounden to make to him? This is ever the object of St. Paul's discourses, on that which our

Blessed Redeemer has done for man; and unless we so apply that which he has said, his preaching is to us vain, and our faith is also vain—We are yet in our sins.

There remains nothing of real difficulty in the rest of this chapter, with which we must close our enquiries into this epistle for the present year. That passage which says, “The law entered that the offence might abound;”* evidently points to no dispensation of severity on the part of God. It states only that the enactment of law, had, as a natural consequence, caused more acts to be accounted for offences, than would otherwise, by man, have been considered as such. And this is said generally; not of the law of Moses alone, but of the divine law in general, for the accurate translation of the passage is *without* the article.† “Law (not *the* law) entered” so “that the offence might abound.”

* 20 v.

† Νόμος παρεισηλθεν ινα πλεοναση, &c.

The natural consequence of the existence of a divine law, is stated by the Apostle. But it is not stated with a view to condemnation. It is to shew forth the richness of divine grace through Jesus Christ: the benefits of which (he is careful again to impress this) are extended to all, in spite of that criminality in regard to the strictness of divine law: to which law we are, in justice, liable. They are extended, in spite of our infirmities and imperfections and failures; "through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

What then, as he asks elsewhere, shall separate us from the love of Christ? What, when so great privileges have been extended to us, shall render them fruitless, and make the grace of God of none effect? Something there is (my brethren) which too manifestly does produce such lamentable, such fatal fruits. Something there is, which, though it do not, and cannot make void the purposes of the Father, nor the mercies of our

Redeemer; does throw too many into such a condition, in regard to his holy covenant of grace, that the promise becomes, as to them, of none effect.

It is not that their faith itself, so far as they have it, is made void; but it is that what they call faith is void in itself: that they have little in them which really deserves to be called faith. A mere empty name and profession, is of necessity void in itself; void of any claim or hope grounded on the promises of the Almighty.

And now is the time, above all others that ever have been within our recollection; when we are all called, within our holy church, to stir up the grace of God which is upon us. Now are we called to be most visibly, and manifestly, and particularly careful, that we receive not the grace of God in vain; and that we attempt not to rely on the mere name, without the substance of christianity. If ever it was needful, that the purity of our profession should be shewn

forth in our lives, the time is now at hand; nay, it has actually come upon us. *ad 179*

And shall we now sit down in indolence, giving a fatal and ruinous example, to them who will be but too ready to follow it? Shall we not exert ourselves, to make manifest that beauty of holiness which belongs to our belief and worship, by our lives and conversation? Shall we not give that most effectual, because most intelligible of all modes of contradiction, to them who revile our national religion, and say that it is not the true faith of our Lord Jesus Christ? *dignos*

St. Paul strictly enjoined his converts, to give none occasion to the enemies of our Lord to blaspheme. Let us then be careful to abide by his warning. *Iordan 10. noitshuqni*

To blaspheme, does not in that place mean that which we commonly call blasphemy. It does not mean only outrageous curses, and open dishonour done to the name and attributes of God. The Apostle uses the word here in its original sense: which is, when

simply considered, to speak evil (to whatever that evil may be applied). His converts lived among bigotted Jews, or idolatrous Gentiles. He therefore exhorts them so to live, that their profession of a faith, which they (the Jews and heathens) opposed, might not be such as to give countenance, to the things which they would speak against that faith. And so he reproaches the Romans,* "The name of God is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles through you."

The days have come, my brethren, when enough, and more than enough will probably be found, to revile our holy protestant faith, if they can see any thing in the lives of its avowed followers, on which to fix the imputation of unholiness. The days have come, when nothing can safely be neglected; whether of the outward, or of the inward part, of Protestant Christianity. The days have come, when we must bear in mind, how only one thing will suffice to cast us under the curse of God. *ii.24. *See also the next page.*

both parts of our Blessed Saviour's injunction, with more, in regard to many, than their usual attention in passed times, "Make clean first the inside, &c. that the outside may be clean also." Nor can such cleansing and such care be spared, either in one part, or the other. Great is their delusion, who imagine, that they can stand in safety, on their freedom from all intention to do dishonour to God, or (which comes to the same thing) to religion; whether it be outward and visible religion, or inward, and witnessed only by their own conscience. The latter indeed all men know to be, as it were, the essence, the very spring, and root, of all that is good in its fruits. But let not the faith of our fathers be put to shame, by the refusal of the children to conform themselves to the outward ordinances also, to those of self-restraint, and mortification. Let not that, which was intended to be an *open* profession, of our desire to be found obedient to the rules

and institutions of godly living according to the gospel of Christ; be neglected for the sake of any evil ways, and ungodly dissipations. Such will ever tempt us to indegence; but they will bring reproach on that religion, which we all profess, at least, to venerate it no less than our parents did; and it is by the lives and conversations of those who call themselves children of the church of this land, that the rules and doctrines (and faith) of that church, will, by very many persons, be judged. It was so, when first the errors of a corrupt church were abandoned, it was so, that those persons were then most easily made to be invisible. The defect was shewn and seen first of all; in the unholy manner of living which appeared in the conduct of very many among its sons, and its advocates. But the reformed churches on the contrary, were then careful to maintain good works; and by them to shew the purity of the belief which produced them; or rather to

This test is not indeed (for there will be hypocrites); it is not unerring in its operation. But it will generally guide to a right judgment, and can hardly fail of being applied to us. The teaching of our Saviour was, "Ye shall know them (that is the persons professing true doctrine) by their fruits;" and that rule will be strictly applicable so far as the persons, in every case.

But in order to judge of the doctrine itself much more than single cases must be observed. The general tendency, and the usual effect of the whole must be kept in view; as well as the conformity of the teaching with that revealed word, from whence alone the real rules of righteousness before God can be drawn.

But still we must bear in mind, that it is not inward holiness alone (though that be undoubtedly the first, and the fundamental matter); it is not that *alone* which will suffice. The "beauty of holiness," must also be made to appear; if we would not have

the true and pure doctrine of our Saviour to be blasphemed; and evil reputed; through us; and on account of our departure from that which we profess to follow.

Remember then, my brethren, that both we, and the form of faith and worship, and the doctrines which we hold as the true doctrines of the Christian Religion, are now especially, put, as it were, upon their trial! If we will not endure to deny ourselves, for the sake of that Lord whom we profess to follow, will it not be concluded that we are led by a mode of belief, which does not require us to walk in his footsteps? If we, with all our means of knowledge in divine things, refuse to "keep under the body and bring it into subjection;" shall it not naturally be concluded, that we do not pursue the way of Him, whose holy word by his Apostle teaches us plainly and positively so to do? If we be found "lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God;" shall not the ignorant be ensnared through our laxity of

practice? And will they not naturally be led to believe, that they who so do, and yet profess to follow the faith of Christ, are not rightly following it? How dreadful! How terrible shall be the account, which they must render up to the Judge of the spirits of all flesh;—they, I say, through whose unbridled and unauthorised liberty, the weak brother, for whom Christ died, shall thus be drawn in to perish!

My brethren, another year of probation will pass, before we meet again to continue these lectures in this holy place; if indeed we ourselves be allowed to see that day, or to meet anywhere on earth, at that season. If then there be any virtue among us; or if any praise which the Almighty can bestow, be really held in estimation with us; “think on these things.”

Great is our responsibility; and the Lord alone knoweth when we must, each one of us render up an account of our stewardship. Remember, that if we would not be made

accountable for the misguidance of others, by our example; we must learn well and carefully, even in outward deportment, to guide our own ways. If we would not do dishonour to the religion which we profess, before the face of its adversaries; we must honour it in their sight; by more strict, and attentive following of it, in all; though it be unpalatable to the lusts of the flesh; in all, I say, which it requires.

So may the Almighty bless us, and preserve us pure and spotless, in his service! And, in his good time, so may He bring us to his everlasting rest, as those who shall have fought the good fight of faith; through Jesus Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate!

FINIS.

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